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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A NEW FEMININE IMAGE:
WOMEN IN POPULAR AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1890-1917

by

© JESSIE MARGARET ANNE CHISHOLM

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "A New Feminine Image: Women in Popular American Literature, 1890-1917" submitted by Jessie Margaret Anne Chisholm in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The spirit of reform which dominated American political and social life between the years 1890 and 1917 was, above all, a response to the impact of an new industrial urban order which had shattered traditional institutions and undermined cherished agrarian ideals. Most disturbing to many observers was the havoc which the city and factory had wrought upon American women and that sacred triumvirate, marriage, motherhood and the family. Tempted by unprecedented opportunities in education and in the professions, many women expressed a dissatisfaction with a definition of femininity which had relegated them to the sheltered walls of kitchen and nursery. Denying that their constitution precluded an involvement in the ruthless, often sordid world of politics and finance, these "new women" proclaimed their equality with their male counterparts.

Historians who have studied the woman's movement in the Progressive era have concluded that it became an one-issue campaign on the part of middle class ladies who agitated for the franchise as the panacea for all women's ills and woes; only within bohemian and radical circles, they argued, did "women's rights" mean more than a demand for political equality. Such an interpretation is erroneous, for it overlooks a preoccupation by the American public with the "woman question" as one of the most pressing social

problems in the Progressive era. The new woman was frequently of middle and upper class origin, a lady who had become disenchanted with her protected, luxurious life. Yet she asked for something much grander than a ballot. In the nineteenth century, the "womanly woman" had been the feminine ideal. A soft, gentle creature, she had fulfilled herself only in marriage and motherhood, abhorring involvement in the outside world as unfeminine. The new woman denied that she should be confined by her biology to the role of childbearer and housekeeper; women, she declared, must enjoy the same freedom, the same experiences and opportunities as did men if they were to express their individuality. In the practical sphere, the new woman wanted the right to enter all professions and to pursue a creative career, even after marriage; economic independence was a prerequisite to a meaningful participation in society. Repudiating a patriarchal family structure which had subordinated woman to the whim of her husband, she envisioned marriage as partnership, the union of two equal, sovereign souls. In a wider sense, however, the phenomenon of the new woman challenged traditional concepts of sexuality as defined by roles and occupations, and questioned the most sacrosanct of American institutions, the nuclear family.

The sweeping implications of Progressive feminism were recognized by the American reading public; the new woman, whether depicted as heroine or villainess, emerged

again and again as the pivotal character in much of the era's best selling fiction. Popular literature has been much ignored by scholars, shunned by literary critics as inartistic and labelled by historians as fictional, therefore unreal. Yet, mass literature reveals many of the aspirations and fears of a given society in that it weaves readable plots about "relevant" topics; Americans in the Progressive era thought the woman question to be relevant. A study of American attitudes to Progressive feminism, as echoed in the popular literature of the period, can provide meaningful insights into one of the most pressing of human problems - the role of woman in society: an issue which has lost none of its urgency or its controversy.

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CHAPTER ONE

"A Cranky, Feminist Age..."

> "...what was the most salient and peculiar point in our social life? The answer was: the situation of women,...the agitation on their behalf..."
>
> Henry James (1883)[1]

"Is this land of America, this New World, to become a mere shelter, a free lodgings for the fortune seeking adventurers of the universe, and all because our women have chosen sport, book learning, factory life, money, as an end and aim, rather than the home?"[2] The question posed by Mrs. Van Vorst's doctor-philosopher (no admirer of the modern American female!) in her melodramatic novel, Issues of Life, was one very familiar to her contemporaries. The "woman question" - the debate concerning the proper role of the female in American society - became suddenly urgent and controversial during the Progressive Era, for the pre-war decades were marked by dramatic incursions on the part of the "gentler sex" into areas of life traditionally considered "male".

In the past, the ideal of American womanhood - the "womanly woman", the "true woman", her sympathizers called her - had been tender, passive, self-sacrificing. Devoting herself to her husband and children, she had sought personal fulfillment only within the confines of marriage and motherhood. In a land where individual "rights" were frequently

defined in terms of political freedoms and responsibilities, she could not vote or hold public office; ironically, the denial of these basic political rights were justified by the exalted station which womanhood held in the minds of the American public. A supporter of woman suffrage in Her Infinite Variety was severely upbraided by a lady who exclaimed, "[You would] bring her to a level with man, to make her soil herself with politics...you would have her degrade and unsex herself by going to the polls."[3] The "womanly woman" dabbled in art, played pleasing tunes and wrote refined verse, but scorned intellectual pursuits as ends in themselves. Although kind and sympathetic, a staunch supporter of church charities and moral codes, she did not actively involve herself in the larger social and ethical issues of her age.

The "new woman" (termed a "wild woman", a "mannish woman", a "shrieking sister" by less sympathetic onlookers) was self-reliant, economically independent, and socially aware, with a keen sense of her own individuality and potential.[4] Frequently single, she was a "career" or "professional" woman; if a member of the upper class leisure elite, she expressed strong discontent with her "parasitical" life. The "new woman" agitated for the suffrage, and she belonged to a number of clubs, some concerned with the plight of workers, particularly fellow women, in a rapacious capitalistic system. (Cynical conservatives had a quite

different image of the new woman; she was unbecomingly aggressive, egotistical, avaracious, faddish and superficial - hence her affinity for Causes.) In any case, the new woman represented a lifestyle, a code of values, an image quite antithetical to that of the womanly woman.

Although marriage and motherhood were still seen as the ultimate sources of feminine fulfillment, they were no longer the only outlets for the new woman's creativity. The most dramatic of these new opportunities was education. Between 1870 and 1890 the number of colleges admitting women almost doubled and the number of female college students increased fivefold.[5] In 1896, 322 of 472 colleges and universities within the American states were co-educational.[6] Moreover, there was a radical alteration of curriculum. Formerly, education for girls had, as its goal, the moulding of a charming personality - gentle, innocent, elegant, which would grace a household as wife and mother. Consequently "her education was founded upon the simple theory that the less a girl knew about life, the better prepared she was to cope with it. Knowledge of any sort (except the rudiments of reading and writing, the geography of countries she would never visit, the dates of battles she would never mention) was kept from her...".[7] Now, girls were exposed to the same subjects as were the boys, were excited by radical economists and sociologists,

and elated by a sense of being part of a new age. "Might not such a [reform] movement start from the colleges for women as well as from Oxford, from Paris," exclaimed Helda Lathrop in A Listener in Babel, avowing her committment to the ideals of the American Republic. "It is a democracy under whose fostering care these new priviledges had been offered to the women of the new age."[8] Indeed, college-educated women dominated a variety of social reform movements.[9] The plaintive complaint was raised by many, however, that these new educational notions "hardened" a woman by exposing her to a "man's world". Sniffed one feminine objector, "Who does not love far more than mere cleverness that sweetness of temper, that sunny, contented disposition..."[10]

If broadening educational facilities emphasized the variety of experience outside the home and created an articulate, competent elite, the increasing number of professional opportunities guaranteed the new woman economic independence, thus reducing her reliance upon the men in her family. In 1840, only seven gainful occupations were open to women.[11] By 1900, five million women were employed in the U.S. in 400 occupations. True, the relative number of working women was small; in 1900, 20.6% of females over sixteen years were gainfully employed,[12] and the majority worked long hours at tedious, monotonous jobs in

sweltering factories. Yet, during the Progressive Era, there was a noticeable modification of the public's attitude to professional women. Edna Ferber, whose career-girl stories and novels captivated a large reading audience (including Theodore Roosevelt) recalled that it was considered radical for a middle class woman in the 1880's and 1890's to work, even when faced with a dire economic crisis (except in those "ladylike" but unremunerative skills as book binding, embroidery, china painting, piano lessons) although the townspeople accepted with complacency the employment of working class girls in the local paper mills and stores.[13] Yet in the years preceding the Great Wars, new women heroines are depicted approvingly as successful barristers, doctors, architects, travelling saleswomen, real estate agents, factory administrators, journalists, novelists, and cartoonists - an indication of the transformation in attitude toward the capability of the career woman.

The number and variety of women's clubs and organizations created during the Progressive Era were astonishing: Daughters of the American Revolution; United Daughters of the Confederacy; National Association of the Deans of Women; National Consumer's League; the Junior League; the National Woman's Trade Union League of America, to name but a few. The club movement achieved such power

and prestige that in 1901 Congress awarded a national charter to the General Federation of Women's Clubs.[14] The club-woman was caricatured derisively as a pretentious matron, who flattered her ego by listening respectively, if uncomprehendingly, to sophisticated talks on tedious topics and relieved the boredom of her afternoons by gossiping, in elegant tones, of course, over teacups. In reality, the club movement served an extremely important function in creating a sense of solidarity among women. "Women, before the present century, led as far as other women were concerned, a solitary existence," noted Martha White. The significance of the club movement lay in the "establishment of frank, disinterested relations, based on the same sympathies, tolerance and community of interests which characterize friendships among men."[15] Moreover, the clubs were extremely effective as agencies of social reform; they fought for child-labor laws, compulsory education, liquor control, municipal improvements (town libraries, parks, playgrounds),[16] and they provided the leadership with necessary administrative skills. Finally, through the clubs, particularly the working girls' clubs and the settlement houses, the upper class became aware of the existence of their less fortunate counterparts. Hilda, the observer at Langley Hall in the novel A Listener in Babel, watched with amusement as the fashionable elite, filled with righteous enthusiasm, sought to eliminate poverty

through lofty ideals and impractical means. "Women were taught palatable cooking...in utensils which they never saw before and cannot afford to buy...a mother's club received instructions as to the proper diet of babies according to the latest and alas! often most expensive methods..." Yet, she concluded,"she had never lived before with people who were moved by even a faint desire to share their treasures with the world at large."[17]

Most disconcerting to many observers, however, was the pervasive sense of discontent and restlessness, particularly among the young, the vague, often inarticulate mutterings of revolt against a woman's lot in the world and the angry rejection of the passive and domestic role traditionally assigned her. "I'll rather die than become a victim," vowed Gabriella, a new woman[18] and her promise was echoed by many of her modern sisters.

2.

> "people defying their betters, women deserting their natural sphere, atheists denying hell... young girls talking about independence and their own lives... - Ha!"
>
> - Hagar (1913)

Why this discontent, this pervasive sense of grievance? Was not America a paradise for women? Were not American females unusually free and independent when compared with their counterparts in Europe?[20] "At no period of the world's history has a nation created a happier

environment for its women than the U.S. does today." So concluded one Australian tourist in an article aptly titled "The Most Selfish Beings in the World."[21] Many observers of the American scene concurred. American women married freely, with little regard for parental guidance; they travelled unescorted, without arousing the opprobium of their fellow countrymen. They had extensive property rights -"We can make, keep, lose and bequeath money as freely as our fathers and husbands," one woman proudly claimed.[22] They were respected and protected by their husbands, lavished with luxury; in comparison with the leisurely and comfortable lives of their wives, American men toiled long hours to maintain their homes, working like "beasts of burden" under taxing conditions.[23] Finally, the mechanization of the home had greatly reduced the drudgery of household chores (which, in any case, were mainly performed by faceless and forgotten servants, the other half of American womanhood). No wonder men were baffled. "Think how their grandmothers had to work...now all these ridiculous creatures had to do was to touch a button and men's brains do the rest...yet nowadays they are making more fuss than all the women that ever lived before, put together."[24] Even among the women in the lower classes, the same independence was noted; American girls avoided the humiliating servitude of domestic service and refused to toil in the fields, as did peasant women elsewhere in the

world.[25]

This comfortable, romantic portrayal of middle class American womanhood offered no explanation for the new dissatisfaction, for why should women complain, sheltered as they were, from the worse aspects of life? Some dismissed the woman question as a fad. "The New Woman will not continue long in the land. Like other fashions, she is destined to excite notions, to be admired, criticized and forgotten."[26] Had there not been feminist movements in America before, militant radicals who had demanded suffrage and worn bloomers and preached free love and who were remembered with derision, if at all? Were not these new feminine spokesmen representative of the lunatic fringe, "mannish women" belonging to what has been aptly called "the third sex"?[27]

More pensive commentators were reluctant to dismiss the matter so quickly, for they recognized important differences between previous women's movements and that of their own age. Earlier feminist causes, despite their publicity, had relatively few active adherents; the new woman, the women who worked in the factories, or attended collegeor entered a profession or belonged to a club or engaged in social reform, numbered in the millions. Although the majority of women clung to domestic values, perceptive observers realized that an altered status for the feminine

half was no longer threat or prophecy, but an actuality. Moreover, those who demanded an extension of political rights or who criticized the subjugation of women were frequently the daughters of an upper class elite, the caretakers of American ideals. "No previous one [movement] in this part of the country has had so much leadership or so much following of a supposedly conservative sort."[28]

With increasing agitation, conservatives perceived a tendency among American women to avoid the traditional responsibilities of marriage and motherhood. Pointing to the decreasing birth rate, alarmists talked wildly about "race suicide" and the impending absorption of the Anglo-Saxon race by sullen, slovenly immigrants with their swarms of children. Women were marrying later, if at all. Despite conflicting evidence from statisticians, it was widely believed that the majority of college educated women deliberately chose not to marry, dedicating themselves instead to a sterile pursuit of knowledge.[29] Even working girls were reluctant to become wives. "The factories are full of old maids; the colleges are full of old maids; the ballrooms in the worldly centres are full of old maids."[30] If women were more hesitant about assuming the joys of holy wedlock, they were also more willing to cast off its burdens. The number of divorces awarded in the American states increased dramatically (by 1900, the percentage of divorces per population was two times greater than that of

liberated Switzerland and thirty times greater than that of Great Britain),[31] and concerned commentators muttered that it was largely the fault of the wives who had grown weary of their domestic roles.[32]

When a collection of Old Chester stories was published in 1900 - written by Margaret Deland, an important prewar writer on the woman question, and portraying life in a small, preindustrial Pennsylvannian village, one reviewer noted wistfully that they recalled the "quaint ways and manners of an almost forgotten past, over which broods a peace found only where...modest competition was all that was considered either necessary or desirable, and where the jostle and rivalry of a busy world are unknown."[33] The Progressive Era was an epoch of cultural crisis, caused by the rapid urbanization and industrialization of the nation during the nineteenth century, and the acrimonious debate concerning the position of the woman in society is comprehensible only when considered within this atmosphere of confusing flux, of nostalgia for a vanishing agrarian lifestyle, for a simple, free yet ordered existence, on the one hand, and on the other, a confident belief that the new urban industrial order augured well for mankind. For the new woman was a creature of this brash new order; upon this both liberal and conservative agreed. "Machinery is the cuckoo that has pushed women out of the nest of domesticity...I haven't a blessed thing to do in

my good home," exclaimed Freddie Martland in The Rising Tide, scoffing at the naivete of her companion who had mildly suggested that housework should absorb a woman's energy.[34] It was industrialization which had created unprecedented opportunities for middle class women in business and in the professions, and had forced lower class girls into the factories to supplement the meagre income of their families. It was the cities with their variety of experience, "their useless agitation, the feverish rush" one critic remarked grimly, that offered a vision of life much larger than the stifling confines of home and marriage. This identification of the new woman with the modern industrial order complicated the debate, for the arguments of observers were strongly coloured by their personal reactions to the rise of the American city.

A dispassionate discussion was rendered even more difficult by the peculiar moral and mystical image which "Womanhood" represented in the American mind. In Christian mythology, the ideal lady was the Madonna - tender motherhood with sheltering arms about a helpless infant, compassionate, pitying, merciful, yet removed from the grim sordidness of the human condition. The "womanly woman", the "true woman", the Southern "lady" were also archetypes of maternity and the embodiment of ethical values - innocence, purity, humility, gentle virtues which implied

a rejection of the crass materialistic pursuits of everyday life. This glorification of womanhood as life giver and moral paragon in effect limited her role to marriage and motherhood. "...the only thing which was held up to her as praiseworthy was the tender ministering to the needs of those around her...the conquest of men by beauty and charm."[35] Moreover, a woman was seen as a social being, incomplete as it were, without the love of husband and children; in contrast, the "manly" man was rugged, self-reliant, individualistic, frequently a loner, a drifter without ties - an image of freedom which has persisted in frontier folklore and the haunting songs of the road. Finally, woman was the stabilizing force within the nuclear family unit, the basis, it was believed, of modern society and civilization; although subject to the authority of the husband, the wife was the source of that love which created family harmony. In a world of confusing change, the stability of the home suddenly seemed very dear.

"The Workingman and the Woman, the New Woman, be it remembered, meet us at every page of literature written in the English language,"[36] one reporter noted, rather impatiently, in 1894. It is unfortunate indeed that subsequent historians have largely ignored the preoccupation with the woman question during the Progressive Era, for the topic offers valuable insights not only into the

position of women in society during this crucial period, a useful study in itself, but also a revealing commentary on their vision of community, morality and purpose in life. When Henry James complained that the modern decades were a cranky feminist age and Henry Adams, brooding darkly over the fate of contemporary civilization, lamented the altered status of women, they were convinced that the woman problem was symbolic of something larger that was amiss in the soul of America. They, like many of their fellow citizens, viewed the woman question as part of a cultural and ethical disintegration.

3.

> The shy, respectable, commonplace woman; the woman of ringlets...and many babies... is evolving ideals that are changing her life...
>
> "The Change in the Feminine Ideal" (1910).[37]

"The heroines of romance and drama today are a different sort from the Evelinas and Arabellas of the last century," Charlotte Perkins Gilman noted with approval in 1898. "Not only do they look differently, they behave differently."[38] Her observation was not unique; numerous contemporary critics had also noticed the creation of a new woman in literature, distinct from the conventional heroine of an earlier age. The authors were not unconscious recorders of society's altering attitudes toward women. A brief glance at popular literature published during the

Progressive Era will indicate that a large percentage of best sellers dealt explicitly with the woman question, particularly the role of the new woman vis a vis home marriage.

In 1908, the publication of Together, a savage indictment of modern womanhood, shocked and scandalized American readers. Its author, Robert Herrick, contemplating the responsibilities of the novelist, scribbled in his notebook that it was the duty of the writer to describe, accurately and dispassionately, the problems and ills of the society in which he lived.[39] This definition of novelist as social critic was accepted, in practice, by many of his contemporaries, whose "social" or "problem" novels were primarily concerned with a realistic portrayal of American life. They rejected the "sordidness" and "depravity" of the French naturalist school, they retained a romantic fondness for happy endings, but they analyzed, in depth, the major issues threatening the Republic.

Some of these novels, works by Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather, still survive as minor classics in the American literary tradition. The majority are now seldom read, at least in academic circles. Literary critics have dismissed them with derision, contemptuously noting their stilted prose, their tiresome digressions and their melodramatic plots, ignoring their infrequent but

nevertheless moving insights into human existence. As philosophical treatises, they appear didactic, rigid, often hopelessly outdated. Yet as historical evidence, they can be invaluable. A novel, a short story, a play - like a diary, is basically a subjective document, a fragmentary, distorted glimpse into a complex world through the eyes of a contemporary. However, literature which achieves popular acclaim, regardless of its artistic merit, is something which transcends the view point of an isolated individual; in touching the minds and hearts of large numbers of people, it somehow reveals and articulates common inner needs, desires and aspirations. Winston Churchill, Margaret Deland, Harold Bell Wright, Edna Ferber, Thomas Dixon were popular novelists and story tellers during their day; their works were eagerly read and widely quoted, often serialised in the leading magazines. All were concerned with the impact of the new woman upon American society. Hence, an evaluation of their works can provide valuable insights into popular attitudes toward the woman question in the Progressive Era.

Traditionally, writing had been one of the few occupations open to women in America. By the "feminine fifties", so many gentlewomen were publishing novels, poetry and children's stories that Nathaniel Hawthorne scornfully termed it an age of scribbling females. However, the reading public of the nineteenth century did not expect

that women should write about the same subjects as did a man. "The beauty, delicacy, ideality and grace of femininity is as necessary in literature as it is in society," one literary critic gravely admonished. "As a preacher of the beatitudes of moral and spiritual refinement, as a prophet of the ideal regions of exalted womanhood and manhood, woman possesses in literature...a masterful influence."[40] In the late eighties and early nineties, a number of writers broke with the tradition of the womanly authoress, and began exploring areas traditionally reserved to men. Margaret Deland recalled ruefully that her father had vigorously applauded her first book, a slim volume of pretty nature poems, because "they are pleasing and perfectly suited to a young lady", but strongly opposed the publication of her first novel in 1887, a study of a Calvinist minister, for what could a woman know of such matters.[41] The release of the Descendant in 1893, written by a frail Virginian girl, shocked Southern gentility, for she had discussed illegitimate birth, a matter a "lady" refused to acknowledge as real.[42] In short, during the Progressive Era, a number of women were writing, in an unprecedented manner, about the world in which they lived, expressing strong and articulate viewpoints about woman in American society.

Vascillating between a sympathetic understanding of

the new woman's discontent, and a loyal adherence to the mystical image of the "lady." Progressive writers were at times, ambiguous, contradictory and illogical in their treatment of the woman question, so much so that the reading public was frequently misled concerning their intended purpose. Robert Herrick, for example, was a staunch traditionalist who strongly disliked modern women, bitterly attacking their excessive individualism and exposing their foibles; yet, ironically, he himself was persecuted as a radical who had defamed American womanhood and encouraged sexual license. It is this ambiguity which renders a neat classification of Progressive writers hazardous, indeed impossible. For the purpose of this essay, the terms "liberal" and "conservative" are used only in their widest sense. The "liberal" is one who is dissatisfied with the existing order and sympathetic to its victims; who accepts institutions as necessary but maintains the primacy of the individual in society; who cheerfully insists on the inherent goodness and power of humanity and the possibility of peaceful reform. The "conservative" accepts the existing order as ordained by divine or cosmic plan, honors society's institutions as necessary counterweights to the weakness of humanity, and resists change, distrusting the inherent avarice of the individual. In the context of the woman's question, the liberal emphathized with the woman as exploited minority, supported her right to legal and political equality,

but agonized over the conflict between the individualism of the woman and the demands by the institutions of marriage and family. The conservative accepted the patriarchal family structure, lauded the sanctity of marriage and the home, and stressed the inherent differences in personality, roles and responsibilities between the sexes. The issue is further complicated, however, by the reaction on the part of reformers who, in rejecting the blatant economic individualism which characterized the capitalist order, re-iterated the values of social concern and responsibility. The woman's question and its emphasis on the individuality of women provided a puzzling dilemma to liberal thinkers, intent on constructing a sense of community amid the anarchy of the modern industrial urban state.

"It is only by perfectly realizing this tradition of womanly woman, it is only by completely understanding how deeply it has colored almost all that man has written about women...that she shall begin to grasp the profound significance of the woman's movement,"[44] wrote Ellen Glasgow in 1913, in a perceptive article concerning the depiction of the heroine in fiction. The literature of the Progressive Era is a valid point of departure for such a study, for a considerable portion was dominated by a preoccupation with the woman question.

NOTES

[1] Quoted in Irving Howe's introduction to the Modern Library edition of Henry James' The Bostonians.

[2] Mrs. John Van Vorst, The Issues of Life (New York: Doubleday, 1904), p. 198.

[3] Brand Whitlock, Her Infinite Variety (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Marville Co., 1904), p. 119.

[4] The term "New Woman" was a general designation describing women who had become absorbed in activities outside the domestic sphere. Usually, however, it was applied to Anglo-Saxon middle class professional woman, although it was also used, contemptuously, to describe the preoccupation of an upper class elite with social functions at the expense of the home. It rarely included immigrant or black women who represented a large percentage of America's female work force, particularly in jobs requiring unskilled and manual labor.

[5] William O'Neill, Everyone was Brave (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), p. 148.

[6] Henry Finck, "Are Womanly Women Doomed?," Independent, 53 (1901), 269.

[7] Ellen Glasgow, Virginia (New York: Doubleday, 1913), p. 21.

[8] Vida Scudder, A Listener in Babel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903), p. 50.

[9] Christopher Lasch, The New Radicalism in America (New York: Knopf, 1965), p. 35.

[10] Amelia Barr, "Discontented Women", North American Review, 162.

[11] Carl Degler, Out of our Past (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 352.

12 Finck, p. 270.

13 Edna Ferber, A Peculiar Treasure (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 73.

14 Degler, p. 360.

15 Martha Smith, "The Case of the Woman's Club", Outlook, 59 (1898), 479.

16 Degler, p. 360. See also Ann Scott, "The New Woman in the New South", South Atlantic Quarterly, 61 (1963), 473.

17 Scudder, p. 127.

18 Ellen Glasgow, Life and Gabriella (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1916), p. 201.

19 Mary Johnston, Hagar (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), p. 118.

20 Foreign observers of the American scene, including persons of such diverse ideological backgrounds as Alexander de Tocqueville, Lord Bryce and Auguste Bebel considered American women among the freest in the world.

21 "A Diatribe against American Women," Review of Reviews, 14 (1896), 609.

22 Marion Harland, "Women as Human Beings," North American Review, 154 (1892), 760.

23 This is a frequent observation of American life made by European visitors to the United States. It was the man who was considered the victim of female domination; see for example, a review of an article written by a German observer, "The American Woman: as seen through German Spectacles" Review of Reviews, 5 (1892), 720.

A variation of this argument was the contention that women

were the "leisure class" in America, equivalent to the aristocratic elite in Europe, and, like old world nobility, served as custodians of American culture. Taken to its logical end, the argument could justify the involvement of women in philanthropic endeavors. See "Editorial" Outlook, 58 (1898), 811-13.

24 Margaret Deland, The Rising Tide (New York: Harper, 1916), p. 95.

25 See "The American Woman: as seen through German Spectacles," Review of Reviews, 5 (1898), 720; Elizabeth Morris, "Mill Girls" Lippincott's Magazine, 54 (1894), 19-23; Mrs. John Van Vorst, The Woman Who Toils (New York: Doubleday, 1903).

26 Finck, p. 269.

27 "The New Woman under Fire" Review of Reviews, 10 (1894), 656.

28 "Editorial: The New Woman and the Suffrage Movement," Century, 48 (1893), 469.

29 Mary Hordan, "The College Graduate and the Bachelor Maid," Independent, 51 (1899), 1937.

30 Mrs. John van Vorst, The Woman Who Toils, p. 81.

31 Degler, pp. 354-55.

32 William O'Neill, Divorce in the Progressive Era (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 62-65.

33 Donald MacDonald, "Mrs. Deland's Childhood," Outlook, 64 (1900), 156-7.

34 Deland, p. 28.

35 F. Franklin, "The Intellectual Powers of Women," North

American Review, 166 (1898), 41-53.

36 Ouida (pseud.), "The New Woman" North American Review, 158 (1894), 610.

37 Margaret Deland, "The Change in the Feminine Ideal" Atlantic Monthly, 105 (1910), 291.

38 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Women and Economics (New York: Harper, 1898), p. 148.

39 Blake Nevius, Robert Herrick: the Development of a Novelist (Los Angelas: University of California Press, 1962), p. 176.

40 J. W. Abernathy, "The Womanliness of Literary Women," Lippincott's Magazine, 55 (1895), 572.

41 Margaret Deland, Golden Yesterdays (New York: Harper, 1940), p. 206.

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CHAPTER TWO

"The Womanly Woman"; "True Womanhood" in Victorian America

> The bride, of course, fainted
> For being acquainted
> With manners, she knew what was right.
>
> - 19th century American rhyme.[1]

"The world can spare its money more easily than it can spare its love and romance, its tender relations, its beauty and the grace and love brought to it by the spiritual influence of good women," concluded Eleanor Whiting primly, in an essay abhorring the growing numbers of working women in America (1898).[2] Her argument was a reiteration of a feminine ideal very familiar to her contemporaries. In the nineteenth century, women were extolled, idealized and romanticized as soulful, ethereal creatures, intrinsically chaste and innocent, lacking those base, barbaric passions common to men. "[Passion] is an unholy attribute implanted by the Creator, with unscrutable wisdom, in the nature of man and left out in the nature of woman," Gabriella was solemnly informed by her genteel Southern mother who was obviously perplexed by God's peculiar sense of taste (Life and Gabriella).[3] In the complacent rhetoric of feminine mythology, the man's world was one of ruthless competition and fierce struggle, a frenzied scramble for wealth, land

and security; women were gentle beings who soothed plaintive children and created comfortable, harmonious homes. Men, engrossed in the grim practicalities of everyday life, had little time or patience for abstract academics; women were refined connoisseurs of culture, who valued beauty and harmony. In countless speeches and sermons women were invoked as the uplifting, spiritual force which represented all that was best in American society. "In the shrine of his secret fancy, she appeared primarily as an object of reverence, a white souled angel clad in the graceful outlines of flesh... a being imbued with the stimulating and intellectual independence he had been taught to associate with American womanhood." (Unleavened Bread).[4]

Symbolic of their superior status were the many chivalrous gestures and acts of deference extended women on the part of men who acknowledged the presence of a lady by a marked abstention from vulgar behaviour, profane language and unpleasant conversation. (Grumbled one unscrupulous tycoon, disquieted by the disapproval in his wife's eyes, "Women and clergy, they are both alike, made for some other kind of world than this.")[5] Feminine ears were carefully shielded from distasteful topics, especially spicy tales of public and private immorality: for several weeks, Margaret Deland had been forbidden by her parents to read the newspapers for they contained indelicate references to the Beecher adultery trial of 1872.[6] The most powerful and

pervasive image of true womanhood, indeed the basis of the reverence accorded her, was that of lady as mother. "None of his daughters could do more than read and write and spell after a fashion," reminisced one Southern gentleman (Life and Gabriella), "and yet," he added proudly, "what wives and mothers they had made": one had borne thirteen children, nine of them boys.[7] His approval of his daughters as "successful" women was echoed by his contemporaries, regardless of sex, for motherhood was regarded as the ultimate expression of femininity.

In 1911, Kathleen Norris published a short novel, Mother: a Story, an articulate and popular vindication of traditional feminine values. Her embodiment of ideal womanliness was an aging mother, Mrs. Paget, seen through the critical eyes of her modern daughter. Married at twenty and mother of eight children, she had worn herself out in hard work and in childbirth, surrendering her personal ambitions, indeed her personal identity, in her concern for her family. ("Her own personal ambitions, if she had any, were quite lost sight of, and the actual outlines of her character were forgotten by everyone, herself included.") The daughter, initially resentful of the anguish of woman's role, gradually accepted the mother's philosophy as good, indeed necessary. "There is something magnificent in a woman like your mother who begins eight destinies instead of one! She does not strain and chafe to express herself

through the medium of poetry or music or the stage, but she puts her whole splendid philosophy into her nursery... She knew that faithful, self-forgetful service and the love that spends itself over and over are the secrets of happiness."[8] In short, the womanly woman as mother, was life-goddess - the perpetuator of human existence, the willing victim upon whose back family and civilization were built, the symbol of ultimate altruism.

Ironically, the idealization of woman relegated her to an inferior position within society and imposed a stifling conformity in behaviour, personality and role. The womanly woman was described in such detail that the slightest departure from the mould was severely censored. Robert Elno McGlone, in his study of American family (1820-1870) discovered that sex roles were sharply defined among middle class children. "Little girls had to be poised and decorative. At six or seven years of age, fashionable girls began to wear stays...in sophisticated urban centers, girls of nine and ten began wearing cosmetics and practising the proper gestures, expressions and conversations... (for)... a proper girl was to be an ornament of society."[9] The feminine role was strictly domestic: marriage and motherhood. Yet, the girl was expected to be passive, shrinking, acquiescent, courted and won by her suitor, never the active arbiter of her own destiny. Within marriage, woman's one

career, she was subordinate to the authority of her husband as head of the household. Extolled as the custodian of culture, a girl was carefully sheltered from controversial thinkers and "unlovely" ideas. Spiritual creatures easily soiled by contact with the real world, women were denied political and legal rights. "It must be aggravating," exclaimed one feminist sympathizer, "when those who desire them to remain without political rights declare women a far nobler creature than man, that she 'has a divine mission' and that it would be a shame to degrade her by asking her to exercise the rights of citizenship...those fetters, however artfully gilded...keep women perpetually as minors, which make them, as a class, the fellows and peers of children."[10]

Ellen Glasgow published an angry essay on feminism in the New York Times Book Review in 1913. Ostensibly a discussion of The Truth About Women (a feminist tract written by E. Gasquoine Hartley) it was a lucid, penetrating exploration of the feminine stereotype in literature. Heroines, she scornfully scoffed, were always womanly women, imbrued with "modesty, goodness, self-sacrifice, an inordinate capacity for forgiveness, 'about as much religion as my William likes', and now and then, a little vivacity - all sufficiently diluted to make the mixture palatable to the opposite sex."[11] The object of her sarcastic attack were

male authors who had created and perpetuated a stereotype of womanhood which had been accepted by women themselves. "Ages of false thinking concerning her on the part of others," Miss Glasgow claimed, "have bred in women the dangerous habit of false thinking about herself and she has denied her own humanity so long and so earnestly that she has come at last almost to believe in the truth of her denial."[12] Ironically, in the nineteenth century, those most guilty of perpetuating the myth of the womanly woman were female novelists who offered a consistent feminine model for the emulation of their many readers.

The gentle, sweet ladies of the nineteenth century frequently whiled away idle hours absorbed in the maudlin sentimentality of the "domestic novel". Melodramatic tales of home and family, the domestic novels glorified as heroine the womanly woman who ultimately triumphed amid life's sorrows, because of her intrinsic spirituality.[13] Generally written by women for women, scorned by men as insipid and damned by critics as inept, they were, nonetheless, the best sellers of the Victorian age; no literary work matched the popularity of Mrs. Susan Warner's A Wide, Wide World (a melancholic story of an ill-treated, but pious orphan); Augusta Evans Wilson's St. Elmo (a moralistic tale of a chaste woman who converts her lover from sinister rake to sincere minister) or Martha Finley's "Elsie books" (a syrupy series about a dull, but very good girl). The plots

were frequently absurd, always predictable; the characters wooden stereotypes. "Take a brokenhearted Georgia beauty," wrote Rose Terry Cooke cynically, "a fairy princess -- a consumptive school mistress - an elderly lady with a drunken husband - a young woman dying of the perfidy of her lover" and one had the essentials for a successful domestic novel.[14] Despite their imperfections, however, domestic novels are significant, both for their portrayals of ideal womanhood, and their subtle, at times unconscious, assumptions about the role of woman vis à vis that of man in the highly structured world of Victorian society.

The heroine in the domestic novel was invariably beautiful, graceful in her mannerisms, elegant in her dress. She was dutiful, ever willing to sacrifice her own pleasure for the gratification of father, husband or child. In the Lamplighter, a popular tale of the mid-fifties, the heroine, an orphan, was a paragon of self-sacrifice. She nursed her disabled benefactor until his death, attended the needs of a blind woman, looked after her sweetheart Willie's ill mother and insane grandmother, discovered the old woman who had berated her cruelly as a child, forgave and cared for her, converted a hardened sinner (later discovered to be her father) and, when trapped in a flaming steamboat - a familiar tragedy in domestic novels - insisted that her bitterest critic be first saved. Her strength lay in her spirituality.

Women in the domestic novels (aside from that anomaly, the "wicked woman") lacked the baser passions in which normal men excelled; hence, they were constantly thwarting the evil designs of unscrupulous lovers, patiently bearing the odious behaviour of tyrannical fathers or drunken husbands. The heroines, although feminine and refined and seemingly unhurried, were competent, efficient and practical when necessary. In Out of the Wreck, a wife, deserted by her alcoholic, profligrant and unfaithful husband, established a millinery shop, educated her three children and achieved an enviable social status through hard work and efficacious planning. In short, the womanly woman of the domestic novel was the epitome of woman on the pedestal, a glorification of womanhood as superior in her morality, loftier in her aspirations than her male counterpart.

For all outward appearances, domestic novels expounded traditional social patterns and values. Departures from conventional morality ended in tragedy. Maidens sometimes succumbed to the wiles of licentious suitors but only to be betrayed by their love; broken in spirit, they returned home to grieving relatives, to die in childbirth, the victim of their own innocence and the perfidious selfishness of men. A good girl aspired to marriage as her ultimate fulfillment, and the center of her interest after matrimony was her home. Domestic novels romanticized the daily routine

of endless housework and dramatized the petty joys and sorrows of everyday life; authors waxed lyrical over a burnt cake, a mistake in drawing, a touching hymn, a child asleep. No girl wanted a career; a woman worked to support her fatherless family only until wooed and won by a wealthy suitor. Divorce was tabboo; a woman bore the provocations of an erring husband, or, if driven beyond endurance, left him, but never dallied with extramarital affairs or denied the eternal bonds of marriage. Motherhood was a blessing, children a gift from God, innocent creatures to be longed for, petted and sheltered. Women aspired to be intellectual, but seemingly only to be able to engage in repartee with their male suitors; ladies did not dabble in the larger theological and social issues of the day.[15]

Despite their glowing descriptions of domestic life, and their relentless advocation of conventional feminine virtues, however, there was an undercurrent of restlessness, a dissatisfaction with woman's lot in life. Although woman was a superior creature, she was the victim of a male dominated society. The villain in the domestic novel was invariably a man: an immoral lover who pursued poor orphan girls, hapless widows and defenceless virgins; a faithless husband who squandered the family fortune in gambling dens or saloons; a wild son who brought shame and sorrow to a mother's old age. Helen Waite Papashvily, in her pioneer study of domestic novels <u>All the Happy Endings</u> discovered a remarkable

similarity in the background of the authors; nearly all were upper middle class women disillusioned with men who had betrayed their love and confidence. Their grievances, she argued, although a product of personal tragedies, mirrored the frustrations and anxieties of Victorian women. Extolled in sermon and speech as superior, spiritual beings, they were, economically, politically and legally, inferior persons, confined within a role which only death could alter or destroy.[16]

Domestic novels offered no solution to the woman question other than the righteous assurance of the inevitable triumph of feminine virtue (if not in this world, then in the next) and a vicarious pleasure in the defeat of masculine tyranny; villains were ruthlessly murdered, lost at sea, stricken with mysterious plagues, reduced to sniffling poverty and abject humility, graciously forgiven and quickly forgotten by their long suffering women. Until the day of their vindication, women were counselled to submit, for their fate had been decreed by God. "Remember, my darling, who it is that brings this sorrow upon us," Ellen was cautioned by her mother (A Wide, Wide World), "though we must sorrow, we must not rebel."[17]

In the eighties and nineties, changes were noticeable in the treatment of women by domestic novelists. Despite traditional disapproval of working women, ladies in destitute circumstances assumed management of family enterprises

or were employed in offices and department stores. Laura Jean Libbey popularized the working girl novel in a series of books like The Romance of the Jolliest Girl in the Book Bindery; Only a Mechanic's Daughter; A Magnificent Love Story of the Life of a Beautiful, Wilful New York Working Girl: The Little Beauty of the Passaic Cotton Mills; her total sales exceeded sixteen million copies.[18] New surroundings did not alter the basic theme. The heroine was rescued from her predicament by a sympathetic entrepeneur and the reader was assured a comfortable romantic portrayal of working conditions climaxed by a happy ending, themes which still dominate schoolgirl romances, and "women's stories".[19]

An impatience with the devices of sentimental literature, and a reaction against the fluff of romanticism on the part of a more literate and sophisticated reading public in the last decades of the nineteenth century popularized a realistic portrayal of life by novelists. Although repudiating the stark, amoral realism of the French naturalist school, authors attempted to recreate the atmosphere of a given society through an impartial marshalling of observations and to explore in depth the problems inherent within a particular social structure. Where the woman question was a submerged theme in the domestic novels, camoflaged by the elaborate contrivances of a creaky plot, it

was the subject of "objective" scrutiny by regional chroniclers in populist America and a topic of explicit debate by the "social novelists" of the Progressive Era.

2.

> Born an' scrubbed, suffered and died"
> That's all you need to say, elder.
> Never mind sayin' "made a bride",
> Nor when her hair turned grey,
> Jest say, born 'n worked t' death
> That fits it -- save y'r breath.
>
> - "A Farmer's Wife" (Prairie Folks)[20]

"I've lived in hell long enough," complained one farm-wife dully ("Lucretia Burns"). "I've slaved here day in and day out for twelve years without pay...I'm worn out. My strength is gone, my patience is gone..."[21] Gaunt, wasted and weary, distorted with work and child-bearing, a travesty of "womanly" womanhood, she represented the brutal plight of numerous wives and daughters in pre-industrial America. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, angry young writers, disillusioned with the realities of rural existence and pained by the incredible hardship and degradation which marked the lives of friends and relatives, published grimly realistic narratives of farm life. Most effective were the heartrending stories of Hamlin Garland, a Populist sympathizer who wrote with passionate indignation of the "human waste" in the rural regions of the Midwest and Western states. "The wives of our American farmers fill our insane asylums. See what a life they lead, most of

them," he noted bitterly..."No music, no books, seventeen hours a day in a couple of small rooms...a dreary past - a well nigh hopeless future."[22]

Farm women toiled long, unpleasant hours - cooking over hot stoves, sewing, patching, preserving, churning, tending the garden, watching over broods of sickly children; frequently, they assisted their husbands in the farm work, sorting and bagging the wheat, milking cows, in what one author termed "the fate of a household drudge with not a moment's leisure from sunrise to night for a thought above the grubbing existence of domestic beast of burden."[23] Even less fortunate were the immigrant women, the daughters of Norweigians and Germans, who toiled in the fields, barefoot and sunburnt, like any farm hand; they were viewed with contempt by their Yankee neighbours as 'alien' and 'peasant'.[24] The drudgery of aching labor was intensified by a nagging sense of futility and frustration. Despite their toil, farmers fell increasingly into debt, caught between falling produce prices caused by a glutted world market and rising expenditures, crippling mortgages, exorbitant interest payments, high transportation and storage rates. "It's having no let-up," complained one woman wearily, "just doing the same thing right over 'n' over - no hope of anything better."[25]

In the past, farm girls had married early. "At sixteen, they had beaux, at seventeen, many of them had

actually married and at eighteen they might often be seen with their husbands, covered with dust, clasping wailing babies in their arms; at twenty they were not infrequently thin and bent in the shoulders..."[26] Courtship was a brief and pleasant interlude, a break from the routine drudgery of everyday life. There was less self-consciousness about sex in rural America than in the polite society of the city; a teacher, a graduate of Harvard and a native of Connecticut, newly employed in a conservative Amish village of Pennsylvania, was astonished at the freedom allowed unmarried couples in the "setting up" custom, and acutely embarrassed at the non-chalance with which details of pregnancy and childbirth were discussed at the dinner table.[27] Farm girls were more knowledgeable about sex. "She knew little lambs and calves and kittens did not grow in the woods. She knew that babies were not brought by the doctor and did not come down from heaven."[28] As life on the farm became increasingly difficult, women were more reluctant to marry. "It don't pay to marry these days...Marriage is a failure these days for most of us," a school teacher concluded despairingly. "We can't live on a farm and we can't get a living in the city." Bradley Talcott, a congressman from the Midwest, was appalled by the number of young girls in Washington, petitioning, frequently enticing, the representatives for patronage. "Did it not all spring from the barreness and vacuity of rural life?" he inquired.[30]

Despite a more open attitude to sex, the marriage structure was rigid and conventional; the man was the head and provider, the woman subservient and acquiescent. The "instinct possession, the organic feeling of proprietorship of a woman"[31], inherent within the patriarchal family structure, was brutalized by harsh economic distress. Lucretia Burns (Prairie Folks), a farm wife dulled with toil and neglect, complained despondedly that her husband treated her like a farm animal. "He never mentioned his love-life, or if he did, it was only to sneer obscenely at it. He had ceased to kiss his wife or even to speak kindly to her. There was no longer any sanctity to life or love."[32] Soothed a sympathetic friend, "It's all this suffering and toiling, all to no purpose that makes him sour and irritable."[33]

The isolation of rural life was deadening; a visit by a travelling salesman, an occasional Sunday meeting or "revival", a circus in a nearby town provided momentary excitement. If men had few diversions, women had virtually none. "It ain't been nothin' else but scrub an' rub, bake, stew/the hull, hull time over stove or tub/No time to rest as men folk do."[34] It was the monotony, the ugliness of shabby farm homes, the lack of beauty and stimulus which women found most depressing. "To live here was to be a cow, a tadpole!" thought Rose (The Rose of Dutcher's Coolly) rebelliously, "here you could arise at five o'clock to cook breakfast and wash dishes and get dinner and sweep, and mend

and get supper and so on and on till you rotted, like a post stuck in the mud."[35]

The quality of life for women in the more prosperous rural villages was hardly better. Stories of placid village life were popular in the Progressive Era, particularly among those disillusioned with urban society, and nostalgic for a pleasanter, simpler past. Two of the more effective and skillful chroniclers of pre-industrial life were Mary Wilkins Freeman and Margaret Deland. Mrs. Freeman, a woman who staunchly affirmed that marriage was a girl's birthright[36] and consequently spent much of her life supporting an alcoholic husband, published a series of sketches describing life in small, poor but proud New England villages. Margaret Deland, a cautious, frequently critical sympathizer of the woman's movement, became well known for her Old Chester tales, a collection of stories depicting a conservative, WASP community in Southern Pennsylvania. "I do think more of making my characters true, and having them do and say just the things they would say and do," wrote Mrs. Freeman to Hamlin Garland in 1887. "That is the only aim in literature of which I have been conscious myself."[37] Neither sentimentalists nor angry young rebels, both women achieved a relative detachment and realism in their work.

"The best club for girls is their mothers' fireside," growled Dr. Lavendar, the venerable minister of Old Chester,

when a bright young idealist had ventured to establish a girls' organization.[38] A distrust of the modern, a suspicion of the novel and the different, a rigid adherence to the age old rituals of marriage, birth and death and an adamant acceptance of tradition - what Mrs. Deland termed an absolute "satisfaction with the existing order"[39], characterized the atmosphere of small rural communities. Villagers distrusted the industrial magnate and the unionized laborer, the college educated and the vagrant, the atheist and the Catholic. They believed there existed a set of constants, a changeless pattern of life and rules which was illustrated in the ways of their forefathers. Particularly distinct were the roles assigned man and woman. A man was strong, authoritative, the head and the support of his family. An excess of manly qualities was tolerated. The husband who was agressive, tyrannical, morose was accepted complacently, but the local bachelor who was shy of women was viewed with amused contempt; the gentle man who loved flowers or read poetry was considered "simple". Similarly, a woman was expected to be refined, dutiful, religious, maternal and tidy; neighbours were dismayed by one woman "great, overblown, rosy, easy, sensuous...her lack of self-repression, her exuberance of emotion before every stress of life shamed them."[40] Women themselves were frequently caricatured as the most adamant caretakers of village conventionality: "thin and pale, with closely shut, thin lips, delicately sharp chins and noses

and high narrow foreheads...," they nourished "their souls only on unwatered and unsweetened doctrines and laws... everything out of the broad, common track was a horror."[41]

The villager was very cognizant of a sense of duty. Duty, in its most fundamental form, was the responsibility, parental or filial, which an individual owed to his (her) immediate family. Performed firmly and staunchly as an obligation in itself, duty frequently precluded or minimized the softening influence of love. Wives stoically bore the brutal behaviour of husbands and passively endured what they termed the distasteful physical aspects of marriage, because submission was womanly, ordained by religion and tradition.[42] Girls frequently postponed marriage to support aging parents, or married men they did not love to maintain family status or security; self-sacrifice was a filial duty expected and exacted from daughters.[43] Men were not exempt from the demands of duty; they were to adequately support their family, sheltering them from want or poverty. In times of economic distress, wives spent frugally, scrimping on household and personal necessities, but they never thought of supplementing their income by working in the local shops, nor would their husbands have expected or allowed such an enterprise.[44]

For the village woman, life extended little beyond the perimeters of her home, the market and the table of

afternoon tea. Women had a minimal interest in politics; with no political rights, elections and parties were hardly relevant. Beyond church picnics, charity baskets and donations to the poor, the ladies evidenced no concern for the larger social issues of the day. Intellectual endeavors were frowned upon; women read sentimental tales of winsome heroines and angelic children but were ignorant of the titans of thought. As a result, women had little to say to their husbands. "Although being a wife and a mother is the only vocation of a married woman, being a husband and father is only one of many vocations of a married man," concluded Mrs. Deland, somewhat plaintively in a short story "Amelia", a sympathetic portrayal of the plight of a woman "who has been left behind mentally by her husband."[45] In such a world, in which a woman's role was defined in terms of marriage and motherhood, where other avenues of fulfillment were dismissed as "unwomanly", the situation of spinsters was particularly pitiful. Knitting, crocheting, endlessly repeating tidbits of gossip or the exploits of a pet cat, recounting symptoms of last winter's illness were the pastimes of their sterile and narrow existence. They were so dismally isolated from life, moaned one married woman over the plight of her two single sisters.[46] If widowed and bereft of benevolent relatives, women had few opportunities for renumerative employment. "If they were wealthy, the daughters collected rents and saw lawyers and

belonged to a club and tried to keep youthful at parties. If middle class, daughters taught school, almost invariably. If poor, mother did the washing and daughter collected it."[47] Such was the fate of women in nineteenth century America.

3.

"Women (are)...asking something truer,
something commoner than chivalry..."

- V.V.'s Eyes (1913)[48]

The "womanly woman" - the lady exquisitely attired, elegantly presiding over the tea cups, the baby asleep in the nursery, attended by a faithful servant in starched uniform, was, in essence, an aristocratic ideal, the symbol of a lifestyle impossible for the average American woman. Yet woman idealized was so much a part of the rhetoric of everyday life that observers dazzled by the finery of the image, rarely saw the reality of women's lives. Reflected congressman, Bradley Talcott, "He had not thought of women as having any active part in living. In the thoughtless way of the average man, he had ignored or idealized women according as they appealed to his eye." (A Spoil of Office).[49] The image of "womanly womanhood" invoked the hazy rememberances of a leisurely (mythical) past, of an age of graciousness and charm since destroyed by the new industrial order. "The world was much pleasanter for women," sighed one modern socialite, "when things were more primitive, when they just had households and babies

to look after." (Austin's Girl)[50]. To many women, trapped in appalling and hopeless lives, the feminine ideal was a symbol of what life might have been, a vicarious escape from a terrifying reality. Dorothy Richardson, author of The Long Day, an expose of the miserable conditions prevalent among the working girls of New York, was amused and somewhat baffled by the popularity of the domestic novel among the factory women of that city. She recalled a vivacious conversation between two boxmakers (earning at the best of times, a meagre four dollars a week) over the plight of a favorite heroine, Little Rosebud Arden, a Southern belle, wronged and ruined by a Harvard graduate. As they worked, they talked too of "bankers and mill-owners who in fiction have wooed and won and honorably wedded just such poor toilers as they themselves."[51]

Women frequently were the most adamant defenders of the feminine stereotype. In part, it was a reluctance to surrender a privileged status in the community, a complacent satisfaction with the small courtesies, the protective security, the economic support accorded a lady. Gabriella (Life and Gabriella), forced by ill fate to seek employment in a shop, was not enthusiastic." (She) thought regretfully of all it would mean to give up her half-dependent and wholly ladylike existence and go to work... Necessity, not choice, was driving her."[52] More important, women themselves believed that they had one role in life,

that of wife and mother, a role ordained by scripture, and sanctioned by custom and history. Rebellion against their station in life was wrong, indeed futile, for it contravened the most primeval of all natural laws - the intrinsic difference between masculine and feminine personalities. "Remember...who it is that brings this sorrow upon us...though we must sorrow, we must not rebel." The plaintive admonishment was a summary of the hidden tension inherent in the sentimental literature of Victorian America: the frustration of being confined to a role which only death could alter or destroy. So convinced were many women of the righteousness of the feminine stereotype that they rationalized their own incursions into larger social life of the republic by legalistic, often ludicrous distinctions between the duties of the respective sexes. An administrator of six hospitals in the Boston area, Clara Leonard labelled her job as a mere extension of woman's traditional ministering to the sick and the helpless, but strenuously opposed the demand for suffrage by her sisters because it would involve them in the masculine (and immoral) world of politics.[53]

"Not a few women of the happy classes had grown "sick of parties," commented Dr. V. Vivian approvingly (V.V.'s Eyes). "They grew sick of years lived without serious purpose, waiting for husbands and children which sometimes never came, sick of their dependency, of their

idleness, of their careful segregation from the currents of life about them. They wearied, in short, of their position of inferior human worth."[54] One may expect that the poor women of America, toiling on the nation's farms or in her factories, would be the most critical of the feminine stereotype, for the reality of their existence was a crude parody of "true womanhood."[55] Ironically, it was upper class ladies, whose lives most closely paralleled that of the ideal woman, who became the most articulate of the new women. Frequently well-educated, they were aware and profoundly influenced by the questioning of traditional values, and the searching criticism of a social system which produced sweat shops, tenement rows and robber barons. Indeed, the woman question was but part of a larger cultural crisis which characterized the Progressive Era. The demands of the new woman were radical in implication. They desired an elimination of the economic dependency of women and a restructuring of the patriarchal family. This meant, in turn, a re-definition of the feminine personality, or rather, a repudiation of femininity as defined in the nineteenth century, and a rejection of traditional roles. The new woman necessitated a new man, one who would welcome and accept a reduction of masculine authority. In short, the problem of the new woman required a radical alteration in the most fundamental of human concepts - the way in which an individual defined

her (his) sexuality, and in the most basic of human institutions - marriage and the family. Phrased in the lofty rhetoric of the era, "A fanfare of trumpets is blowing to which women the world over are listening... they present to the world a new problem, a new force -- or a new menace."[56]

NOTES

1 Quoted in Margaret Deland, "The Change in the Feminine Ideal," The Atlantic Monthly, 105 (1910), 293.

2 Eleanor Whiting, "Woman's Work and Wages" Lippincott's Magazine, 61 (1898), 677.

3 Ellen Glasgow, Life and Gabriella (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1916), p. 10.

4 Robert Grant, Unleavened Bread (New York: Scribner, 1900), p. 43.

5 Robert Herrick, Memoirs of an American Citizen (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1963), p. 169.

6 Margaret Deland, If This Be I: as I Suppose It Be (New York: Appleton-Century Company, 1965), p. 56.

7 Glasgow, p. 22.

8 Kathleen Norris, Mother: a Story (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1911), p. 17, 175, 189.

9 Robert Elno McGlone, "Suffer the Children: the Emergence of Modern Middle Class Family Life in America, 1820-1870" unpublished doctoral thesis (University of California, 1971), p. 272.

10 J. B. Bury, "The Insurrection of Women," Literary Digest, 6 (1894), 89.

11 Ellen Glasgow, "Feminism," New York Times Book Review, (1913), 656-7.

12 Ibid., p. 656.

13
Information concerning the "domestic" or "sentimental" novel was drawn from Helen Waite Papashvily, All the Happy Endings (New York: Harper, 1956); Russell B. Nye, The Unembarrassed Muse (New York: Dial Press, 1970), chapter one, "Stories for the People," pp. 10-42; Beatrice Hofstadter, "Popular Culture and the Romantic Heroine," American Scholar, 30 (1960), 98-116.

14
Quoted in Russell Nye, p. 26.

15
An exception to this attitude were the novels of Augusta Jane Evans, in which the heroines were self-educated and well versed in physics, metaphysics, mathematics, Greek, Hebrew and astronomy. Her writings reflect the excitement felt by women as colleges and universities for female students were established after the Civil War.

16
Helen Waite Papashvily, notes in the foreward to All the Happy Endings that "the domestic novels were handbooks of another kind of feminine revolt...a lethal draught brewed by women and used by women to destroy their common enemy, man." See pp. 14, 24.

17
Susan Warner, A Wide, Wide World (London: University of London Press, 1950), p. 76.

18
Russell B. Nye, p. 28-29; Helen Papashvily, pp. 199-200, 202-207.

19
There is little difference between the stereotype of the "womanly woman" in the domestic novel and that depicted in "masculine" literature. According to Nicholas Karolides, in his study of women in western novels, "Silks and Calico" The Pioneer in the American Novel, 1900-1950 (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 1964), the romantic ideal of womanhood dominated frontier stories until the twenties. Women were innocent, delicate, genteel and chaste, gentle qualities which required the sheltering arms of a strong man. Sensitive to beauty and culture, they represented those civilized values which demanded the stability of an ordered society. Women, in particular, the heroines, played a passive role in the plot, exercising their influence through goodness and kindness; secondary female characters were portrayed more realistically, but they too were seen as advocates of institutional, ordered patterns of existence.

20 Hamlin Garland, "A Farmer's Wife," Prairie Folks (Chicago: Stone and Rimball, 1899), p. 79.

21 Hamlin Garland, "Lucretia Burns" Prairie Folks, p. 98.

22 Ibid., p. 104.

Mr. Garland's indictment of rural life is not an isolated phenomenon in popular fiction. It is echoed in Harold Frederic, Seth's Brother's Wife (Ridgewood: Gregg Press, 1968) whose setting is the farming region of New York; in Helen Martin, Tillie (New York: Century Co., 1904) a depiction of an Amish community in south eastern Pennsylvania; in Edna Ferber, Fanny Herself, (New York: Frederick Stokes, 1917) - The observations by Miss Ferber concerning the miserable conditions of farm women are repeated in her autobiography, A Peculiar Treasure (New York: Doubleday, 1938) See also Upton Sinclair, Sylvia's Marriage (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1914).

23 Helen Martin, p. 75.

24 See Hamlin Garland, "Among the Corn Rows"; "The Creamery Man," Main Travelled Roads (New York: Harper, 1899), pp. 156, 163, 223, 225, 230.

25 Hamlin Garland, "Lucretia Burns," p. 45.

26 Hamlin Garland, The Rose of Dutcher's Coolly (New York: Harper, 1895), p. 70.

27 Helen Martin, pp. 196, 216, 239.

28 Hamlin Garland, The Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, p. 7.

29 Hamlin Garland, "Up the Coolly," Main Travelled Roads, p. 107.

30 Hamlin Garland, A Spoil of Office (Boston: Arena Publishing Co., 1892) p. 221

31 Hamlin Garland, "A Branch Road," Main Travelled Roads, p. 23.

32 Hamlin Garland, "Lucretia Burns," p. 90.

33 Ibid., p. 101.

34 Garland, "Growing Old" Prairie Folks, p. 254.

35 Hamlin Garland, The Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, p. 148.

36 Quoted in Richard Potter, "Rural Life in Populist America: a Study of Short Fiction as Historical Evidence," unpublished doctoral thesis, (University of Maryland, 1971), p. 33.

37 Ibid., p. 38.

38 Margaret Deland, "The Promises of Dorothea," Old Chester Tales (New York: Harper, 1898), p. 6.

39 Ibid., p. 3.

40 Mary Wilkins Freeman, Understudies (New York: Harper, 1901), p. 195.

41 Ibid., pp. 194-96.

42 The one striking example of rebellion by a woman in these village tales is a short story by Mary Wilkins Freeman. Entitled "The Revolt of Mother," Great Modern American Stories, ed. W. D. Howells (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920) p. 207-25, it depicted the angry resistance by a New England farm wife who learned that her parsimonious husband has erected a barn with the savings promised for a new house. Later, Mrs. Freeman repudiated the story as unrealistic; such resistance was not possible, she argued, given the social atmosphere and values of a New England community.

43
See Mrs. Deland, "The Apothesis of the Reverent Mr. Spingler", "Amelia", "An Exceedingly High Mountain" Dr. Lavendar's People (New York: Harper, 1903); "Sally" Old Chester Tales.

A remarkable example of this filial duty was "Counting the Cost," The Wisdom of Fools (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1897) in which the daughter, a girl "educated beyond her class", repudiated her longing for intellectual fulfillment, to care for her aging father, although she felt stifled and destroyed by the monotony of village life.

44
This disapproval of working wives is most adamantly voiced in Mrs. Deland's "An Exceedingly High Mountain" The Wisdom of Fools, p. 272, one of the few cases in her fiction in which a wife actually proposes to take a job to supplement her husband's income, although many of Mrs. Deland's characters are shabby gentility and constantly plagued by financial worries.

45
Deland, "Amelia" Dr. Lavendar's People, pp. 222, 215.

46
Deland, "The Face on the Wall" Mr. Tommy Dove (New York: Harper, 1893) pp. 62, 75, 80.

47
Sinclair Lewis, The Job (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1917), p. 9. Teaching, one of the few 'respectable' careers open to women in pre-industrial America, was not a pleasant profession as portrayed in Progressive literature. Lewis' heroine, Una, hated teaching, "hated...the airless room and the foul outbuildings, the shy, stupid, staring children, the jolly little arithmetic problems..."; she was echoed by Margaret Paget in Kathleen Norris, Mother: a Story, pp. 4, 12; and Alves in Robert Herrick's The Web of Life, (New York: MacMillan, 1900) which includes a perceptive description of the problems encountered by married teachers.

48
Henry Sydnor Harrison, V. V.'s Eyes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), p. 329.

49
Garland, A Spoil of Office, p. 144.

50
Kathleen Norris, Austin's Girl (New York: Ridway Company,

1913), p. 329.

51 Dorothy Richardson, The Long Day (New York: Century, 1904) p. 74. For an extended discussion of the literary preferences of the working girls, see chapter six "In Which Mrs. Smith and Phoebe Hold Forth Upon Music and Literature," pp. 75-92.

52 Ellen Glasgow, Life and Gabriella, p. 31.

53 Clara Leonard "What Women Can Do Best" Century, 49 (1894), 475-6. Indicative of her attitude was the opposition expressed by many club women to an extension of the suffrage, despite the fact that the women's clubs themselves, with their extensive organization, propaganda and financial means, necessitated the participation of their executive in activities very similar to those practised by politicians. For a light-hearted account, see Brand Whitlock, Her Infinite Variety (Indianapolis: Babbs-Merrill, 1904).

54 Harrison, p. 329.

55 This theme is developed in chapter three.

56 Opening quote in Elia Peattie, The Precipice.

CHAPTER THREE

"Woman in the Market Place": Work, Wages and the New Woman

> "The Woman question is not a political one merely, it is an economic one... The real question is woman's dependence upon man as the breadwinner. As long as that dependence exists, there will be weakness, No individual can stand at their strongest and best while leaning upon some other."
>
> - A Spoil of Office (1892).[1]

In 1899, Kate Chopin, a Southern widow from St. Louis Missouri, published her tragic and disturbing novel, The Awakening. Set in the affluent, conservative Creole society of New Orleans, it portrayed the awakening of a young wife and mother to a sense of her own individuality, and her subsequent attempts to escape the confines of conventional femininity. "I would give up the unessential...I would give up my life for my children," Edna Pontellier resolved, "but I wouldn't give up myself." In an attempt not to surrender her identity, she moved from her husband's comfortable mansion to an adjoining cottage which she had furnished with her own income. This measure gave her a pleasant and novel sense of freedom and independence, strengthening her determination that she would never again be possessed by anyone.[2]

The symbolic significance of her dramatic gesture - the repudiation of woman's economic dependency as a necessary and preliminary step to a realization of herself as

a complete entity, was a common phenomenon in pre-war popular fiction. Indeed, the most universal characteristic of the new woman was her refusal to accept a subordinate economic position, or a reliance upon a man for her financial sustinance and security. "I am sick of being dependent... I'd rather die than be dependent all my life. I'm going to earn my living," complained Gabriella, to the horror of her well-bred Southern family (Life and Gabriella).[3] "You see women - young women actually choosing to stand alone, actually declining support," grumbled Colonel Ashendyne, in Hagar. "It's part of the degeneracy of the time when you begin to see women - women of breeding - in all kinds of public places work for their living. It's positively shocking." (Hagar)[4]

The alarm with which conservatives viewed the influx of women into the scramble for employment, the shrill insistence with which the new women urged their sisters to gain financial independence, stemmed from a common cause: the identification of femininity with economic dependency. Within the patriarchal family structure, there was a clear definition of roles, a rigid delegation of authority and duties; the man was the provider and protector, supplying his children and wife with food, shelter and security, in the same manner as primitive man had dragged home his kill, and defended his territory against the ferocious attacks of his enemies; the woman was mother and housekeeper, scrubbing,

cooking, sewing, caring for babies, sheltered by the strength of her husband, as generations of women had been before. "Men should do the work of the world and they should support women, that is how God intended it, that is according to both nature and religion" (Life and Gabriella).[5] There was no shame in such a dependency, it was argued, for those gentle qualities in women which deemed support necessary, were a stabilizing force in human history, a foundation for the permanence of the home, the maintenance of the race and the growth of civilization. In the sheltering of his woman, the erratic and nomadic nature of man was tempered with a sense of purpose.[6] The justification of woman's subordinate position was further bolstered by appeals to Scripture and the injunction of St. Paul to the wives of Corinth repeated in endless variations; women, like blacks, had been smitten with their own peculiar curse of Ham. "Your Christianity commands that women should stay at home and declares that they are not entitled to seek their own salvation, to have any place in affairs or to meddle in the realm of the intellect," lamented one agnostic (The Inside of the Cup).[7] The most prevalent rationalizations were voiced in the picturesque rhetoric of the "Cult of Womanhood"; the true woman was sensitive, shrinking and sweetly shy; involvement in the grim sordidness of the economic order would bruise her tender nature. "The bare idea of your working in a shop sickens me. I always think

of you apart from the workaday world. I always think of you as a star shining serenely above the sordid struggle."[8] (appearances to the contrary, the speaker was not a buffoon, but an "ideal Southern gentleman"). The true woman was emotional, intuitive but never coldly rational - in plain English, she was none too bright, and the complicated machinations of sophisticated corporate finance would upset her delicate nervous balance, perplexing her with problems beyond her ability to solve. "A mannish woman is worse than poison, and the less you know about stocks, the more attractive you will be," a husband cautioned his new bride in Life and Gabriella.[9] One woman grimly concluded, "It's what they call 'sentiment' fights them (women who wish to be financially independent). Sentiment don't mind their being industrious, but it draws the line at them getting money for it... them that's industrious don't expect to rise and them that's lazy get lazier. It's a funny world for women" (Hagar).[10]

When queried by a friend why she did not work, as did her radical cousin, Angela (Angela's Business), as dutiful daughter replied,"Father wouldn't think of allowing such a thing. He'd think it was...just charging him with being a failure and not able to take care of his family."[11] Such a man would feel that his virility had been undermined, for his role as provider and protector had been diminished by his inability to provide adequately for wife and children.

Similarly, a woman, faced with dire poverty, would seek employment reluctantly, shamed by her loss of femininity. Frequently, she rationalized her actions by selling her domestic skills: crocheting, knitting, sketching, lettering, china painting, book binding: such lady-like occupations were popular among widows and spinsters - or justified herself by optimistically awaiting better days ahead. "Ma always spoke of women in business as unfortunate and hardened; she never spoke of her livelihood as anything but a temporary arrangement." (Saturday's Child).[12] Because economic occupations were rigidly defined in terms of sexual roles, the incursion of women into the employment field and their defiance of convention was both exhilerating and alarming. Colonel Ashendyne sourly concluded about working women, "It opens the gate to all kinds of things."[13]

Kate Barrington, college graduate, settlement worker and heroine of Elia Peattie's The Precipice, had definite ideas on the controversial woman question. "She was convinced," noted the author, "that more than half of the incoherent pain of women's lives could be avoided by the mere fact of financial independence."[14] In the minds of angry young women, economic reliance had reduced their sisters to the status of "chattel" slaves who had sold their bodies in return for food and shelter under the guise of marriage, to the state of mindless "parasites" who had surrendered their dignity for the pleasure of being provided

for: women had been lowered to the level of a "possession", more valuable perhaps, but purchased in the same manner as other pleasant trinkets designed to add comfort to a husband's life. "You and mother simply live on the money your husbands made," Freddie Maitland bitterly challenged. "You are both parasites...the only thing you will do for yourself will be to die" (A Rising Tide).[15] Concluded Carlisle Heath sadly, "I belong to the useless classes. I do not pay my way. I'm a social deadbeat." (V.V.'s Eyes).[16] At its worst, the absolute control over household financial resources exercised by the husband reaffirmed his sense of proprietorship over his woman, and encouraged the brutal and exploitive forces inherent within any hierarchial system of authority. "He treated me like a slave bought for one purpose," complained Rachel in Hagar. "He would have said that he paid me too, that he supported me."[17] Her daughter, she vowed, would be brought up to support herself.

Ill prepared to cope with an existence which precluded the financial security proferred by marriage, women had few skills or resources with which to escape unpleasant circumstances or to fashion for themselves useful and independent lives. Single women were the most tragic of the victims created by a social system in which holy wedlock was the only goal worthy of a lady. Idling their lives

away in wistful dreaming, living on the charity of brothers and cousins or toiling aimlessly at ill-paying jobs, the object of amused pity and ridicule on the part of their neighbours, spinsters had little hope of achieving fruitful careers.[18] To the girl with no skills and few opportunities in a society where a career woman was a subject of contempt, marriage remained the only means of financial security. In Edith Wharton's tragic novel, The House of Mirth, the doomed heroine, daughter of shabby gentility, was assured that her beauty would constitute her fortune, for it would secure her an advantageous marriage. The prophecy was false. Alone and humiliated, Lily Bart died from an overdose of sleeping pills, "an unmarketable product in the only arena open to her, the marriage mart."[19]

2.

> "Of course, a woman should be free and independent, but is she free when pressure forces her into typewriting or work in a sweatshop."
>
> - The Rose of Dutcher's Coolly (1895)[20]

In 1904, Dorothy Richardson, a social worker in New York city, published The Long Day, an autobiographical expose of the grim conditions prevalent among working women in that city. "It is a true book. It is a human document," commented novelist Jack London in a lengthy review. "Who will dare to say that the working girls of New York, tens of thousands of them...are at least...as comfortable as the naked savage?"[21] Orphaned at eighteen and restless with

the "placid monotony" of western Pennsylvania, Miss Richardson had come to New York, optimistically seeking the fashionable careers and the carefree life she had supposed were the fate of working women in the great cities. "Work was plenty enough," she recalled ruefully. "The question was not how to get a job, but how to live by such jobs as I could get."[22] She worked at a series of petty jobs for meagre wages ($3.50 to $4.00 per week) under backbreaking conditions until she collapsed from physical and mental exhaustion. "In the storybooks, it was always so alluring - this coming to the great city to seek one's fortune," she remembered plaintively. "I used to love...to pull my rocking chair into the chimney corner and read magazine stories about girls who lived in hall bedrooms on little or nothing a week, and of the good times they had."[23] The stories of Laura Jean Libbey and company were romantic and appealing, but hardly realistic.

Indeed, this romanticization of the working woman was not the common reaction of the American public, who viewed her disapprovingly as an avaricious adventurer. American working girls, sniffed Mrs. John Van Voist, a "gentlewoman" (her publisher's description) who had disguised herself as a factory hand and written a book about her experiences, were frequently selfish pleasure seekers who had spurned marriage and conventional feminine roles. She conceded that women toiled under more deplorable

conditions than did men and for less money, but she concluded sourly that the majority preferred to work, not because they were compelled to do so by economic necessity, but because they were motivated by an insidious desire for independence and personal enjoyment.[24] A farm girl who had resolved to work in a factory, when admonished by Mrs. Van Vorst's hero and spokesman, Philip (The Issues of Life) about the evils of the city and urged to accept the "comfortable" life of a domestic servant, stubbornly insisted "I want to be independent...you can have more fun at the factory." "The moral ignorance of the girl," fumed Philip in disgust.[25] Likewise, employers justified the pitiful salaries paid women by pointing out that female workers squandered their earnings on extravagances and luxury items; their basic needs - food, and shelter, were supplied by the men in their household.

During the Progressive Era, there was striking alteration in the image of the working girl; the stereotype of a giddy, luxury-loving creature was replaced by that of woman as victim, a hapless employee exploited by ruthless bosses and hardened landlords. The change in public opinion has been credited to the ceaseless efforts of various charity organizations, and reform minded individuals who publicized the plight of women workers, and who linked their maltreatment to the spectre of a declining birth rate, infant mortality, juvenile delinquincy and race suicide.[26]

The majority of women worked because they were compelled to do so, reformers argued; they sought employment in order to supplement the meagre incomes of husband or father, or, if orphaned, to support themselves. If lured to the factory and the city by promises of wealth and entertainment, it was because they desired to escape the poverty and drabness of rural life, and not, as Mrs. John Van Vorst insisted, because they had grown restless with a sylvan utopia.. Complained one working girl about her home town in Indiana, "It was so square, - so flat - so dingy - oh, so dreadful... it was just walled in by the nothing all around it...and the people in it are flat and square and dingy. They are walled in too, by the nothing all around them." (The Visioning).[27] She was echoing the observation of Hamlin Garland in A Spoil of Office, "This city is full of ruined young men and women, who came here from the slow moving life of inland towns and villages...and here they are, struggling along on 45¢ a day...preferring to pick up such a living... than to go back home."[28]

With few skills and no job training, women workers were forced to take ill-paying jobs, often under intolerable conditions in stifling laundries, cotton mills or in the sweatshops, bent over sewing machines, making boxes, fashioning paper flowers. Observers were horrified by the physical deformities prevalent among working girls. "Even the backs of the children are bent." (Comrade Yetta).[29]

Undernourishment, disease and physical exhaustion were commonplace. "The thousands who had slipped out were pitiful specimens of humanity," noted Miss Van Vorst in a moving description of mill workers in Southern Carolina, "their clothes (were) hanging on thin exhausted bodies, their pale faces mocking the brilliancy of day." (Amanda of the Mill).[30] Workers complained bitterly about the monotony of tasks performed mechanically day after day, with no prospect for a brighter future. "You get so tired - you get so dead - all day long putting suspenders in a box - or making daisies - or addressing envelopes - and you don't get tired just because your back aches - and your head aches - and your hands ache - and your feet ache - you get tired...because the city doesn't care how tired you get." (The Visioning).[31]

Reformers who agitated for protectionist legislation on behalf of women, warned that their exploitation by industry endangered the domestic and maternal functions of the American wife and mother.[32] Unions demanded maternity leave and shorter hours for female employees, so that they may have "time...to make homes for you men...to constitute a domestic life." (Amanda of the Mill).[33] Indeed, the fact that women were compelled to work was considered undesirable. Miss Van Vorst maintained that unionized women, when provoked, were more militant than their male counterparts because "their toiling condition was the more unnatural."[34] In

Progressive literature, there were two avenues of escape for the working woman: the altar or the streets; in either case, it meant prostitution, the exploitation of one's sexuality for financial gain. Winston Churchill described one such salesgirl who had resisted the profession in hopes of a desirable marriage: "She had been saving herself for what?", he asked bitterly. "A more advantageous sale."[35] Liberals were convinced that low wages, harsh working conditions, poor housing and a lack of recreational facilities forced honest working girls into lives of prostitution.[36]

"They'll give me a job - a mean one," complained one blacklisted union leader in Robert Herrick's Web of Life, "...under the roof in a big loft with a lot of woman hirelings. Regular sweat shop."[37] "Mean" jobs - back-breaking, degrading labor in the laundries or textile mills, shunned by white male laborers as occupations unfit for free born Americans, were shunted onto the unresisting backs of blacks, immigrants and women. The major handicap harnessing women in industry, complained Dorothy Richardson, was their passivity, their acceptance of working conditions and wages which would have incited their male counterparts to protest and strike: a passivity heightened in turn, by a lack of skill and job training which hampered the possibility of advancement from their subordinate positions.[38] "They'll get it [job equality with men] when they know how to do something somebody wants done, as well as a man," commented

Ernestine Geyer tartly (a laundry supervisor in One Woman's Life). "They'll get it now when they've got something to give."[39] Promotion was no easier for stenographers in the nation's countless business offices or for salesgirls in large department stores. "There was no future for her, or any girl here, that she knew," Susan, a secretary, noted in Saturday's Child. "Miss Thornton, after twelve years of work was being paid forty-five dollars, Miss Wrenn, after eight years, forty and Susan, only thirty per month."[40] Employers were reluctant to hire women in administrative positions, were unwilling to promote them to places of responsibility; women, they felt, were irresponsible, incapable of effective decision-making and unreliable. Exceptional women, talented, efficient, highly motivated, could fight their way upwards, despite discrimination and resistance; average women, unlike average men, had little prospect of a brighter future. "She saw that the comfortable, average men of the office, sooner or later, if they were but faithful and lived long enough, had opportunity, responsibility forced upon them. No such force was used upon the comfortable, average woman." (The Job).[41] Women themselves often viewed their jobs distastfully, as a necessary but unpleasant stopgap between girlhood and marriage; a husband, not a promotion, was their ideal of success. In Henry Harrison's Angela's Business, there is a compassionate and moving sketch of what the author termed

"a woman dissatisfied with her economic independence": Miss McGee, an employee in a photographer's shop, returned home each night to her tiny and cheerless room, where she read novel after novel which she did not like, until darkness fell and sleep finally came. Women, like men, became caught in dull routine life, without purpose or direction in which the image of a sheltered femininity was the ghost of a better, but lost existence.[42]

Concern for the "poor working girl" was fashionable in upper class circles. At its worst, it was a patronizing bestowal of charity, a smug disapproval of working girls' "finery" and "extravagance", a tea party or a social for factory employees, coupled with a rigid resistance to an increase in wages, to unionization and to strikes.[43] Ignorance rather than an absence of good intentions, frequently was the basis of this mis-evaluation of the plight of the working woman. Miss Osborne, a socialite with a propensity for social reform (she organized a working girls' club to advise her charges on the management of their meagre $12 per month salaries, but opposed an increase in wages, because it would encourage rising prices and foster extravagance) was baffled and shocked by the suicide of one of her proteges who was "tired of not having any fun". "So trivial...so without soul," was her bitter reaction. (The Visioning).[44] Too often, gentlewomen found it difficult

to forget their station in life, to excuse the absence of decorum, and dignity in the life of the working woman. Gabriella, a Southern lady, forced by unfortunate circumstances into the competitive world, found salesgirls "loud" and "vulgar", and vowed that her own daughters would be educated privately, as befitted their "class".[45] On the other hand, the attention given working women by fashionable ladies was often indicative of their genuine concern, indeed, their vicarious identification with their less fortunate sisters. The club movement was proof of such a feeling. One thing it had stood for from the first, noted Kate Barrington approvingly, was a disinterested determination to help women of all classes develop themselves.[46] Yet this discovery of the common bond of womanhood, while demonstrative of the broadening vision of American women, was not a militant affirmation of exclusive sisterhood, or of unified assault upon the opposite sex, but rather an affinity of shared aspirations, nationality and humanity which transcended traditional class lines: in short, the sympathy of the lady for the working girl was based more upon an image of her as fellow American, fellow Christian, fellow human being than upon an articulate sense of common exploitation by a male dominated social system.[47]

3.

"I've had to fight for most of my happiness"

- Emma McChesney and Company (1915)[48]

"I am tired of these stories of young women who go to the city, there to do battle with failure, to grapple with temptation, sin and discouragement," complained Edna Ferber.[49] Repudiating the prevalent stereotype of working woman as hapless victim of a hostile and degrading environment, her stories were a glorification of triumphant womanhood, her heroines strong, self-reliant and successful, utilizing the diverse opportunities of city life to achieve what the author termed "a broader, finer, truer kind of womanhood."[50] There had been numerous portrayals of successful women professionals, but with an important difference; they had been of upper middle class background, affluent, well-educated. Edna Ferber's women were ordinary girls from obscure families and dusty towns, who without the advantages of social station or intellectual training, achieved security, prestige and happiness through diligence, competence and a native shrewdness. Her stories were the tales of the working people, of those who got the tough end of life, Miss Ferber recalled,[51] never of the rich and powerful, her heroines feminine counterparts of Horatio Alger, winning the American Dream through hard work and rugged individualism.

Her most popular character was Emma McChesney, who represented something novel and fresh in American literature: the successful businesswoman. Divorced at twenty-six and the sole support of a son, Emma had advanced from a position as office stenographer to top sales woman and travelling representative of Featherloom Petticoats in the Midwest, finally to partnership (and, incidentally, marriage to her self-effacing employer), developing a conservative family enterprise into a national corporation.[52] Although a radical departure from the womanly woman, Emma represented a curious blending of "new" femininity and traditional American values. "An immensely vital woman," commented Theodore Roosevelt, an outspoken critic of modern womanhood, "one who could ably combine marriage and a career."[52] Miss Ferber developed similar themes in her two prewar novels, Dawn O'Hara (1911) and Fanny Herself (1917). In the first, the protagonist became a successful novelist, following a gruelling career as a newspaper reporter and a turbulent marriage with a neurotic writer. "I am a woman now," Dawn concluded proudly, "happy in her work,...quicker to appreciate the finer things in life."[54] In Fanny Herself, a semi-autobiographical sketch, the heroine abandoned the petty conventionality of her home town, resolving to "make something of herself...(to) mold a hard, keen-eyed resolute woman, whose godhead was to be success", and achieving her goal in the city as the manager of a large department

store.[55]

"The major women of all my novels, plays and short stories...have been delineated as possessed of strength, ingenuity, perception and initiative. This is because I think women in general and certainly the American female... is stronger in character, more ingenious, more perceptive and more powerful, potentially, than the American male," wrote Edna Ferber in her autobiography, A Kind of Magic, published in 1963.[56] Yet women, she continued, had failed to achieve themselves fully, because they had been relegated to the status of second class citizens under the guise of a femininity, which had confined them to home and husband.[57] It was imperative, in her view, that women involve themselves in the world, an involvement which necessitated experience, competence and economic independence achieved through a creative career. These basic premises concerning women, although articulated most clearly in the above work, were the fundamental assumptions inherent in her popular fiction.

"I want to be in the midst of things. I miss the sensation of having my fingers at the pulse of the big old world...all of which is most unwomanly, for is not marriage a woman's highest aim, and home her true sphere?"[58] Survival in crude materialist terms was not the main problem which plagued Miss Ferber's heroines: long hours, low wages,

dingy boarding rooms, poor food - all these were handicaps which could be successfully conquered through diligence and desire.[59] But they were baffled and perplexed by the difficulty of clearly defining their role in a world where traditional patterns of feminine behavior had become irrelevant, of maintaining their identity as a woman while absorbed in occupations they themselves instinctively labelled as "male". "How can you realize," Emma McChesney queried bitterly, "just what it means for a woman to battle against men in a man's game?"[60] Even when they had achieved financial success and recognition, they longed for the companionship and security which conventional marriage represented.[61] "I'm tired of being a good fellow. I've been a good fellow for years and years while every other married woman in the world has been happy in her own home, bringing up her babies." (Dawn O'Hara).[62] Yet they found the traditional patterns of femininity stifling and restricting. In a short story, "One of the Old Girls", the aging saleslady deliberated between marriage and her career, finally refusing her fiance's proposal, to continue her job because, she concluded, a spinster is her own boss.[63] Emma McChesney, who had repeatedly told herself that she had worked simply for reasons of economic expediency, discovered that when all her dreams were fulfilled - marriage to a prosperous and loving entrepeneur, a comfortable home, fine clothes, endless leisure and luxury, she remained unhappy and dissatisfied.

The problem with herself and with unemployed women, she concluded, was idleness, a lack of purpose in life. "(Women) wandering around here, aimless...because they haven't got anything else to do...nothing to occupy their heads."[64]

Although an active supporter of women's suffrage, Miss Ferber had little sympathy for female philanthropists who espoused the cause of the working girl. "Those other women urging this cause or that," she commented caustically, "were on the outside, peering in," interfering in matters of which they knew little ("Sisters Under the Skin").[65] These "Restless Women" who avowed radical socioeconomic theories were, in reality, reactionaries who attacked the evils of capitalism because they hated the new urban-industrial system. "They think they are advanced, but they still resent the triumph of the motor-car over the horse."[65] An enthusiastic exponent of the work ethic ("work was a sedative, a stimulant, an escape, a diversion, a passion") and an optimistic admirer of the "American Way," Miss Ferber portrayed relations between employers and employed as harmonious and mutually beneficial.

"I think every adult should marry." Miss Ferber affirmed in her autobiography.[67] Indeed, much of her fiction concludes happily in marriage, the dilemma of identity being solved by combining a creative career with blissful wedlock.

Emma found a husband in her employer, but maintained her partnership in his firm. Dawn fell in love with a man who encouraged her in her literary endeavors. Fanny was won by a gentle rancher who insisted that she pursue her artistic ambitions. In concluding the stories at the altar, Miss Ferber blithely ignored the complications caused by children. Would a Fanny or a Dawn, confronted with babies, define themselves primarily as mothers or career women? Were the two compatible in prewar America? Although marriage was of positive value, it was not deemed necessary for happy and fulfilling life.[68] Creative employment and economic independence were. It was possible, indeed proper, that women support themselves, facing the same obstacles as their male counterparts. It was Edna Ferber's confident belief that women, in the American tradition of "rags to riches" could attain the American Promise, that sex was merely a temporary handicap, a discrimination that would rapidly dissipate in ensuing years.

Written in the years immediately preceding the first war, when women had successfully infiltrated numerous responsible and skilled positions, Miss Ferber's stories reflect a new attitude to the career woman. Professional women had not succumbed to nervous prostration as critics had direly predicted; indeed, their success in the competitive world of business indicated that there were no inherent biological disabilities which necessitated their exclusion

from harsh economic realities or which demanded deferential behavior from their employers. Yet, side by side with this new image of the competent and efficient businesswoman, there persisted the stereotype of working woman as victim, - victim not only of a ruthless capitalistic system, but also of an inferior biological composition. Many reformers demanded an amelioration of women's working conditions because of the weaker female constitution. Few asked for equal pay, equal professional training and promotion for they regarded working women as an unfortunate necessity; her true sphere was her home. Moreover, conservatives were frequently more realistic than their liberal counterparts in arguing that relatively few women from working class backgrounds would achieve the success of Miss Ferber's heroines. Indeed, for many working women, the ideal life was that of wife and mother. Noted Ms. Richardson somewhat enviously of her friend, Minnie "She has been successful...in the only real way a woman can, after all, be successful. Minnie is married...and the mother of a charming baby."[69] The economic independence, so valued by the new women of the middle class, was less appealing to the working woman caught in the routine of gruelling labor and unrelieved tedium.

NOTES

1 Hamlin Garland, A Spoil of Office (Boston: Arena Publishing Company, 1892), p. 143.

2 Kate Chopin, The Awakening (New York: Capricorn Books, 1964), p. 270.

3 Ellen Glasgow, Life and Gabriella (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1916), p. 28.

4 Mary Johnston, Hagar (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), p. 76.

5 Ellen Glasgow, p. 257.

6 Anthropological interpretations of the family structure were popular in the Progressive Era. The constant in the varying explanations was the stabilizing force which women represented. A variation of the argument stressed that it was the gentle or domestic qualities of womanhood which had transformed the basic passions of man into positive creative forces. For an articulate presentation of this view, see Margaret Deland, The Rising Tide (New York: Harper, 1916), pp. 237-240.

7 Winston Churchill, The Inside of the Cup (New York: MacMillan, 1913), p. 133.

8 Glasgow, p. 36.

9. Ibid., p. 102.

10 Mary Johnston, p. 112.

11 Henry Syndor Harrison, Angela's Business (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), p. 73.

12 Kathleen Norris, Saturday's Child (Doubleday: New York, 1913), p. 28.

13 Johnston, p. 76.

14 Elia Peattie, The Precipice (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), p. 81

15 Margaret Deland, The Rising Tide, p. 125.

16 Henry Syndor Harrison, V. V.'s Eyes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913),p. 383.

The savage indictment of upper middle class society ladies was an almost universal characteristic of Progressive fiction and is found in the writings of both liberal and conservative commentators. Characterized as "parasites" and "daughters of the horse-leech" (from a Biblical parable in which two daughters deafen their father's ears with clamourings for "more, More"), they were stigmatized as the prime example of the failure of American womanhood as a moral and spiritual force in the national life of the Republic. The theme will be discussed at greater length in chapter five.

17 Johnston, p. 218.

A common observation in the fiction of the era was the fact that women willingly accepted a passive and self-effacing role in return for economic support and frequently evaluated their husbands in terms of his financial means, blithely ignoring his more brutal and domineering qualities. Mr. Pontellier, in the Awakening is judged a "good" husband because of his generosity with money. Mrs. Barrington, in The Precipice is proud of her match, because she is well provided for, despite the humiliations inflicted upon her by a brutal and thoughtless husband.

18 Dorothy Yost Deegan in The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels (New York: Octagon Books, 1969) notes "A large percentage have no vocation as such, or are wholly dependent, while others are seen in insignificant jobs; only a very small percentage hold positions of importance...For most of them, life is monotonous and without hope of adventure." (pp. 92, 106).

19
Doris Grumback, "Reconsideration: Edith Wharton" The New Republic, 168 (1973), 30.

20
Hamlin Garland, The Rose of Dutcher's Coolly (New York: Harper, 1895), p. 188.

21
Jack London, "The Long Day" The Socialist (November 18, 1905), p. 1.

The Long Day was not only a popular socialist document, but received favorable notice in the liberal newspapers. "There may be those who will say that the conditions pictured in The Long Day are impossible and melodramatic", commented one reviewer for the Chicago Journal (November 25, 1905) "but they will be only those who are entirely unacquainted with the actual life of the working girls of the great city." Dorothy Richardson herself vouched for the authenticity of the book's contents. "Every word of The Long Day is true... The incidents are likewise true even to the most trivial detail. And my experience is not a rare one..." "The Long Day" The Socialist (December 30, 1905), 1.

22
Richardson, p. 45.

23
Richardson, p. 30.

24
Mrs. John Van Vorst, The Woman Who Toils (New York: Doubleday, 1903), pp. 81-86.

Her depiction of the experiences shared by working women was prefaced by Theodore Roosevelt's famous diatribe against unmarried people and their contributions to the prospect of race suicide ("...the man or woman who deliberately avoids marriage...and dislike(s) having children, is in effect a criminal against the race, and should be an object of contemptuous abhorance by all healthy people"). The book was widely read, both within the United States and in Europe. For the reaction of an Englishwoman, see Ethel Harrison, "The Woman Who Toils" Nineteenth Century, 54 (1903), 1021-5.

25
Mrs. John Van Vorst, The Issues of Life (New York: Doubleday, 1904), pp. 63-66.

26 Jacob A. Lieberman, "Their Sisters' Keepers: The Woman's Hour and Wages Movement; 1890-1925", unpublished doctoral thesis (Columbia University, 1971).

27 Susan Glaspell, The Visioning (New York: F. A. Stokes, 1911), p. 217.

28 Hamlin Garland, A Spoil of Office (Boston: Arena Publishers, 1892), p. 278.

29 Arthur Bullard, Comrade Yetta (New York: Gregg Press, 1911), p. 61.

30 Marie Van Vorst, Amanda of the Mill (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1905), p. 96.

31 Glaspell, p. 284.

32 Lieberman notes that the basic theme in protectionist arguments was the biological inferiority of women. Although he suggests that it may have been a political tactic to arouse the sentiment of the audience - an interpretation which I question - he does demonstrate that the terms "race suicide" and "sterility" were frequently labelled the products of a society in which women were forced to compete economically with men.

33 Marie Van Vorst, p. 206.

34 Ibid., p. 322.

35 Winston Churchill, The Inside of the Cup (New York: MacMillan, 1911), p. 241.

36 See Ray Lubove, "The Progressives and the Prostitute," The Historian, 24 (1962), 308.

The most explicit treatment of the prostitution question was by David Graham Phillipps in his two volume novel, The Fall and Rise of Susan Lenox, (New York: Appleton, 1917).

The heroine, forced into prostitution by abysmal working hours and minimal wages, is portrayed as good, thoughtful and pure, the victim of a sordid economic system. Embittered by the sufferings of poor working women, Phillipps heaped scorn upon the heads of moralists who babbled about the ethical values of chastity. "Who but the dullest fools in the throes of that bare and tortured life ever thought of God?...If it were wiser to be good, then why were most people imprisonedin a life from which they could escape only by being bad." (p. 344).

37 Robert Herrick, The Web of Life (New York: MacMillan, 1900), p. 17.

38 Dorothy Richardson, pp. 243, 278, 302.

39 Robert Herrick, One Woman's Life (New York: MacMillan, 1913), p. 322.

40 Kathleen Norris, p. 13.

41 Sinclair Lewis, The Job (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1917), p. 234.

Maggie Mager, a Jewish cripple from the East Side of New York who became an executive in a service organization, was the proponent of the optimistic belief that business is an escape for girls from the confines of traditional roles. "On the East Side, always it was work, work and watch all the pretty girls in our block get tuberculosis in the garment factories or marry fellows who weren't any good and have a baby every year and get so thin and worn out." (p. 177).

Una Golden, the novel's heroine, also became a successful business administrator who absorbed herself in her career as an escape from an unpleasant marriage, but never shared Maggie Mager's optimism that business could offer an alternative to conventional fulfillment in love and marriage. "I'll keep my job...But just the same, I am a woman and do need love...I want...my own baby." (p. 327.)

42 Harrison, Angela's Business, p. 60.

43
The indictment of the female philanthropist as a frivolous and conservative socialite was a common one in Progressive literature. See Margaret Deland, "House of Rimmon" Wisdom of Fools (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1897): Mrs. Heath in Harrison's V. V.'s Eyes, the patrons of the working girls' club in Arthur Bullard's Comrade Yetta (New York: MacMillan, 1913); Mrs. Phillipps-Brown in Mrs. John Van Vorst's The Issues of Life (New York: Doubleday, 1904).

44
Glaspell, pp. 158-164, 211.

45
Glasgow, p. 392.

46
Peattie, p. 379.

47
Although unarticulated, there is a strong relationship between the heroine's rejection of her conventional role and her sense of identification with the oppressed working woman of America. In Marie Van Vorst's Amanda of the Mill (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1905) Mrs. Gresmore, wounded by the infidelity of her husband, assumed custody of one of the girls who is exhausted by her heavy labor in Mr. Gresmore's mill. Carlisle Heath (V.V.'s Eyes) identified herself increasingly with the plight of the poor as she rejects her role as "lady". Kathy Jones' loss of naivete (The Visioning) is triggered by her insight into the hopelessness of the working girl's life. Yet there is no explicit statement of common exploitation, except in the rare portrayals of radical feminists (See Freddie Maitland in Deland, The Rising Tide.).

48
Edna Ferber, "Thanks to Mrs. Moussey" Emma McChesney and Company (New York: Frederick Stokes, 1915), p. 85.

49
Edna Ferber, Fanny Herself (New York: Frederick Stokes, 1917), p. 130.

50
Edna Ferber, Dawn O'Hara (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1911), p. 245.

51
Edna Ferber, A Peculiar Treasure (New York: Doubleday, 1938), p. 175.

52
The Emma McChesney stories were collected and published under the following titles: Roast Beef Medium (New York: Frederick Stokes, 1913); Buttered Side Down (New York: Frederick Stokes, 1911); Emma McChesney and Co.

53
Ferber, A Peculiar Treasure, p. 198.

54
Ferber, Dawn O'Hara, p. 261.

55
Ferber, Fanny Herself, p. 107. In a twist from the dominant theme in Emma McChesney, this financial success did not make Fanny happy. It is not until Fanny realized the importance of social involvement and abandoned her lucrative career for that of a social satirist that she truly fulfilled herself. The dilemma is not one of ability or skill - Fanny competes very effectively in a "man's world", but one of goals and value judgements. Despite her marriage, Fanny did not retreat to her home, but remained involved, ably handling a job traditionally reserved for men.

56
Ferber, A Kind of Magic (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1963), p. 283. The essay concerning women was written at a time when, in Miss Ferber's words, there "is no war between the sexes; not even an organized campaign is recorded." (p. 284).

57
"...they (women) conceal this iron structure beneath a sugar coated device...called femininity...women by accepting their privileges as females while failing to claim and use their rights as women citizens, too have failed." (p. 284).

58
Dawn O'Hara, p. 47.

59
Miss Ferber was not glorifying the life of working class girls. She has no illusions concerning the deprivations which existed in the city. See "The Frog and the Puddle", "What She Wore", "Maymeys from Cuba" (Buttered Side Down), "The Self-Starter" (Personality Plus), "Representing T. A. Buck" (Roast Beef Medium). But these were handicaps also shared by men, and women, she believed, were as effective in overcoming these obstacles as their male counterparts.

60
"Chickens," Roast Beef Medium p. 75.

61
In Miss Ferber's stories, marriage is frequently seen by the working girls as an escape from the necessity of competing in a relentless economic system. See, for example, "The Frog and the Puddle" in which the heroine returned home to marry a man whom she finds rather dull but who offers financial and emotional security.

62
Dawn O'Hara, p. 126.

63
"One of the Old Girls," Buttered Side Down, p. 119.

64
"Blue Serge," Emma McChesney and Co., p. 127. Hortense, a former stenographer, and spokeswoman for the lower middle class agreed. "A four room flat for two isn't any work... (it) was all right and natural I suppose, in those times when a quilting bee was a wild afternoon's work and teaching school, the most advanced job a woman could hold down. (p. 30).

65
"Sisters Under the Skin," Emma McChesney and Co., p. 184.

66
Ibid., p. 190.

67
A Kind of Magic, p. 290.

68
Ibid., p. 290.

69
Richardson, The Long Day, p. 266.

CHAPTER FOUR

"The Woman Question is the Marriage Question!"

> "A heroine who does not get
> married isn't a heroine at all."
>
> - Buttered Side Down (1912)[1]

"Why should a woman get married", Tillie, an earnest farm girl from eastern Pennsylvannia angrily asked (Tillie: A Mennonite Maid.). "She loses everything and gains nothing. 'She gets kep'...like the horses. Only not so carefully."[2] Rejecting what they termed the "drudgery" and "slavery" of their mothers' lives,[3] the new women bitterly challenged the confines of traditional marriage, a a sacramentwhich had reduced wives to a state of abject dependence and passive acquiescence. Denied a career outside the home, married women had been relegated to the kitchen and to the tedium of routine household chores. "I dream of a life that shall be larger than the four walls of a home," Elsie Stoneman declared exultantly (The Clansman). "I have never gone into hysterics over the idea of becoming a cook and housekeeper without wages and snuffing my life out while another grows and expands..."[4] The new women were infuriated, too, by the complacent assumption that it was the duty of a wife to placidly accept the suffering and hardship which marked their lives; men must work and women

must weep. "Apathetic, anemic, overworked, she yet never dreamed of considering herself...abused, accepting her lot as the natural one of women, who was created to be a child bearer and to keep man well fed and comfortable" (Tillie).[5]

Marriage meant the acceptance of a patriarchal family structure and a promise on the part of the wife to honor and obey the authority of her husband as head of the household;[6] this patriarchal system was based, the new woman argued, on a blatant and explicit belief in the inferiority of women, an assumption which was recognized and accepted by the true lady. "It was characteristic of her and indeed of most women of her generation that she would have endured martyrdom in support of the consecrated doctrine of her inferiority to man" (Virginia).[7] Such a dogma was dismissed impatiently by the new woman. In their eyes, marriage had reduced women to a state of powerlessness. Wives were reluctant to terminate unhappy unions because they had few financial resources or skills with which to reconstruct a new life on the outside, because they feared the disapproval of shocked relatives, or, more fundamentally, because they could not rebel and still maintain an inner sense of femininity. Schooled in the tenets of wifely submission, they frequently failed to apprehend the tragic incongruity of their situation. Mrs. Barrington in The Precipice considered herself fortunate as the wife of a professional man who provided well for her and her child,

despite his brutal and tyrannical behavior. "Were all wives who became good wives asked to falsify themselves," her daughter wondered despairingly, as she watched the plaintive attempts of the mother, broken in spirit, to please her husband. "Was furtive diplomacy or, at least, spiritual compromise, the miserable duty of the wife? Was it her business to placate her mate, and by exercising the cunning of the weak, to keep out from under his heel?"[8]

Beauty, grace, refinement - with these qualities, it was assumed that a lady could beguile a man, subtly and smoothly effecting her will without openly threatening her husband's dominant position. Of course, women were physically and economically inferior, Sylvia Castleman (Sylvia's Marriage) was advised by her grandmother, but their charm was a potential source of power. "By means of this magic 'charm' - a sort of perpetual individual sex-strike, a woman turned her handicap into an advantage and her chains into ornaments."[9] It was a precarious weapon in woman's meagre arsenal; a loss of youthful prettiness, a disfigurement with age, disease or childbearing, the competition of lovelier less scrupulous rivals, and the lady's only defense lay shattered. Brooding darkly over her fate, pregnant with her first child and baffled by her husband's growing inattention, Sylvia wrote bitterly to a sympathetic friend, "I speculate about my loss as a woman; I see the bitterness and sorrow of my sex through the ages.

I have become physically misshapen...What this means is that I have lost the magic hold of sex."[10]

Sylvia's resentment at her plight, although one of the most explicit and strident cries of anguish in Progressive fiction, was echoed by many new women, who had wearied of a role which had placed maximum value on charming, pleasing, and flattering a man through physical attraction and gentle manners. Women were tired of being "pretty painted dolls," "fragile figurines", "useless ornaments"; although the term "sex object" was not used by the writers, the connotation was implicit in the heroines' rejection of the stereotype of woman as soft, yielding and pretty. "Don't you ever get sick and tired of all these things we do to ourselves to make us look pretty and attractive and desirable," exclaimed Carlisle Heath (V.V.'s Eyes) with girlish pique. "It's the men who make us put in all this time tricking to look pretty...wouldn't it be great to appeal to somebody sometime in some other way."[11] Much later, following a series of jolting discoveries of the sham, materialism and amorality which marked the aspirations of upper class society, into which her life was so intertwined, Carlisle saw with stark and frightening clarity that "where there was no sex, there she...was not wanted...She was wanted as a woman, she was wanted as an ornament, but she appeared to have no particular purpose as

a human being."[12] A preoccupation with externals, with a fashionable dress, a becoming hairstyle, a graceful walk, a quaint phrase, destroyed intellectual aspirations and creative ambitions. A womanly woman was expected to exchange pleasantries, not philosophy, to converse knowledgeably about presidential teas, not presidential policies, to flutter admiringly about artists and musicians, not to be one. Noted Cargill approvingly, concerning Ida Tarbell, Grange leader and social reformer in Garland's A Spoil of Office, "She can forget her sex occasionally and become an intellectual. Most women are morbid on sex. They cannot seem to escape it as a man does part of the time. They cannot rise, as this woman does, into the sexless region of affairs and of thought."[13] Women who sought creative fulfillment were cautioned by sympathetic admirers to avoid the stifling confines of marriage which would subordinate art to the experience of motherhood.[14]

"That is one of the greatest mistakes women used to make," Jenny sternly informed her mother, despondent because of her husband's unconcern, "to imagine that they must be old as soon as men ceased to make love to them...that as soon as a woman stopped being admired, she had stopped living" (Virginia).[15] The womanly woman has supposed that she had but one purpose in life: to be loved and to bear children; the new woman asserted that her experiences must extend beyond the home, even as a man's included many more than

marriage and paternity. The womanly woman had awaited the arrival of the man who was to fulfill and complete her womanhood; the new woman denied that her fulfillment depended upon his approving smile and joyfully stressed her own powers and potentials. "The sins of sins committed by women had been the indifference to their own person. They had been echoers, conformers, imitators...had allogated and measured themselves by too limited a standard...They had not permitted themselves that strong, clean robust joy of developing their own powers for the mere delight in the exercise of power" (The Precipice).[16] The womanly woman had sacrificed herself for the comfort of her offspring; the new woman, although a gentle mother, never lost a sense of her own worth. "I think much precious life has gone dead under that idea of children being enough - letting them be all. We count - I count...in that working for them I'm not going to let go of the fact that I count too" (Fidelity).[17] In short, conventional marriage had imposed a singleness of purpose and experience which had negated the exuberant American belief in the primacy of the individual; indeed, the values espoused by protesting woman, the goal of womanhood as"mind undying, self-authoritative,...the arbiter of her own destiny, the defender of her own person, with an equal goal and right of way",[18] were articulated in rhetoric strongly reminescent of the Declaration of Independence.

If the new women were condemning traditional

marriage, if they saw the conventional wife and mother as the victim of an exploitive system, they were not rejecting marriage and maternity per se. Indeed, in all the novels included in the bibliography, the heroine happily married the man who had patiently loved her from chapter one. What was being proposed in the popular literature was a new kind of marriage: a marriage based on partnership, a marriage which replaced hierarchical patterns of authority with mutual responsibilities and trust. Gone were the conventional roles of wife as housekeeper and domestic servant. Gone too were the assumptions that the wife should devote herself exclusively to home and husband. Indeed, such a total absorption, once considered the essence of femininity, was now condemned as narrow and selfish, destructive to the social unity of the community. "What frightens me at times like this, is...motherhood," Deborah, school principal and social worker, noted thoughtfully. "It's the hardest thing we have to do - to try and make them see and feel outside their own small tenement homes and help each other and pull together" (His Family).[19]

Service to society, a concept so important in Progressive schema of values, necessitated that the married woman continue her involvement in the outside world; ideally, marriage and a career would complement each other, marriage providing those strong and sweet emotional relationships which could increase a woman's sensitivity to human grief

and folly, while offering a sense of personal strength and security. A brief glance at two novels, written by novelists of widely divergent ideological beliefs, will indicate that the ideal of the new marriage as a partnership, integrating the values of motherhood (sensitivity, gentleness, compassion) and social involvement was one held in common by moderate socialists and conservatives. In Comrade Yetta, written by Arthur Bullard, settlement worker and editor of the Socialist journal, the Call, the heroine married a fellow socialist leader, cheerfully bore two children, while continuing to contribute articles to her husband's newspaper. Maternity, she insisted, heightened her effectiveness as an agitator, for it had brought her closer to the primeval forces of life; after all, she concluded, "Socialism is for the babies."[20] Kathleen Norris, a conservative Catholic who proudly affirmed that her husband was responsible for her literary success, wrote a novel, Saturday's Child with a remarkably similar solution. Her main character, Susan Brown, married a trade unionist, had three children in five years, edited a woman's column for her husband's newsletter (the problem with workers' wives, she asserted, was their laziness and inability to economize). Motherhood, she rhapsodized, was a joyous martyrdom which had heightened her ability to serve.[21]

Hamlin Garland, populist poet and novelist, passionately indignant with the plight of farm girls in rural

America ("the wives of our American farmers fill our asylums") and strongly moved by the vision of future womanhood expressed in the writings of Herbert Spencer, presented one of the earliest and most coherent descriptions of the tenets of the "new marriage". His heroine, a strong and independent woman (The Rose of Ducther's Coolly) was courted by an unorthodox and moody reporter who made an unusual proposal of marriage, one which she readily accepted as compatible with her own values and perceptions of life as a liberated woman. "I do not promise to make you happy," he wrote, "I cannot promise a home...I do not feel either that I shall be ever free from money cares...I cannot promise to confirm to your ways...I cannot promise to be faithful to you until death but I shall be faithful so long as I fill the relationship of husband to you. I shall not lead a double life...I exact nothing from you. I do not require you to cook for me, nor to keep house for me. You are mistress of yourself...You are at liberty to cease your association with me at any time...I want you as a comrade and a lover, not as subject or servant or unwilling wife...You can bear me children or not, just as you please. You are a human soul like myself and I shall expect you to be as free and sovereign as I, to follow any profession or do any work which pleases you."[22]

This vision of marriage as partnership was an idealistic solution which allowed the individual maximum freedom

without endangering the maintenance of the race of the viability of society. Yet inherent in such idealism, if implemented, were a series of problems which, given the moral values of the Progressives, proved insoluable. If marriage were indeed a personal promise, an individual commitment, if a wife were free to leave her husband when she tired of him, what of the children and the security of the home? Was it possible to construct a sense of community and social responsibility without a strong family unit, in a world in which other institutions of common identification, - tradition, religion, had been shattered beyond repair by the destructive forces of capitalism and urbanization? Was it realistic to maintain that the rights of a woman as an individual assumed priority over the demands of society, in a system in which economic individualism had created such distress and grief?

Hamlin Garland detested postwar America; appalled by the sexual freedom of the twenties, he soundly condemned the animalism, the selfish, aimless savage pleasure-seeking of a world gone mad. A broken, embittered old man, he sadly recorded the most shattering disillusionment of his life: the divorces of his two daughters. "I, who have stood for decency and loyalty in social life, find myself with two daughters seeking divorces!", he wrote with plaintive amazement. "If they elect to see 'freedom' in the way of women of today, I cannot prevent them"[23], this once radical exponent

of women's rights concluded wearily. In part, it was the conservatism of a reformer repeatedly disillusioned, but also the shock of a visionary who watched helplessly while his ideals were perverted and betrayed. He had assumed that greater freedom in marriage would be utilized for ethical ends; he was vastly disappointed in the bitter recriminations, the scramble for alimony, the savage struggle for the children in which marriages terminated, for reasons which he judged as petty and selfish.

2.

> "It is rather laughable and altogether sardonic and devilish to kneel down and worship as we do the Institution of Staying Together... Stay Together at any price...
>
> - Hagar (1913)[24]

Divorce, the shattering of a union consecrated by God, was not a pleasant thing in the late nineteenth century. In the minds of many Americans, it conjured up images of easy morality and fast living, of sophisticated city folk flaunting divine law in the quest for personal satisfaction. "You see...(divorce) is such an unusual thing. It never happened in Old Chester," noted Dr. King (The Awakening of Helena Ritchie). "Why, I don't believe I ever saw a...divorced person in my life!"[25] The divorce question became the subject of an acrimonious debate during the Progressive Era. Liberals demanded reform of state divorce laws and a

more sympathetic attitude on the part of government and society to the plight of individuals trapped in unhappy relationships; incompatibility, they argued, was as significant a cause for separation as were physical brutality and adultery. A contract which forced two people to live together in misery was a flagrant abuse of their constitutional rights as American citizens. The agitation for easier divorce was vigorously opposed by those who viewed the family as the basis of western civilization and culture; the rights of the individual were not as important as the needs of society.[26] In short, as Margaret Deland noted in a perceptive essay on the divorce issue, the dilemma was whether marriage was a personal problem or a social question, whether individualism was more important than social responsibility.[27]

Conservatives were alarmed by statistics which demonstrated beyond question that not only was the divorce rate rapidly increasing within the republic, but also that the number of divorces granted in the United States greatly exceeded that of any western nation. Foreign observers constantly voiced their amazement at the ease with which American marriages were terminated. Easier divorces, they noted disapprovingly, were but part of a larger pattern of moral and social disintegration which was rending the social fabric of America, destroying her vitality as a people and her future as a great power. "American women were deliberately

turning their backs on natural laws," sniffed one British commentator, who predicted the inevitable breakdown of American civilization, for it was composed of "overworked men and nervous women".[28]

Could domestic harmony survive the twentieth century, wrote Winston Churchill wistfully in his fictional study of marriage and divorce in America (A Modern Chronicle)? "Will it survive rapid transit and bridge and Women's Rights, the modern novel and the modern drama, automobiles and flying machines...hotel, apartment and suburban life?" In the past, Americans had been reared in closely knit family units, had loved their mother and obeyed their father, had worked together in breaking the land, tilling the fields, sharing the warmth of companionship and mutual dreams. So it was remembered. But the competitive economic system with its emphasis on materialism and monetary success, the city with its distractions and bustle and flashing promises of neon pleasure, had corroded old fashioned moral values, facilitating the breakdown of marriage in America.

Bewildered by the antics of their daughters, parents blamed the pleasure-oriented ethics of the new industrial order. A skilful and moving depiction of the conflicting values of two generations was Ernest Poole's His Family, a Pulitzer prize novel. The father, resentful of change,

("immigrants had already spoiled his neighbourhood") was perplexed and angered by youngest child, Laura who spent extravagantly and danced all night in flashy public places. Engaged to a junior member of a broker firm, a man labelled "fast" by society gossips, the daughter airily dismissed the commitment as a mere experiment. Marriage, she vowed, was to include no children; it was simply an effort to determine whether she loved her husband. "You're all of you scared to death about sex - just as your Puritan mothers were and you leave it alone...But I'm not afraid", she proudly boasted, "If our husbands can do it, why can't we?" To her father's horror, she was divorced by her husband on the grounds of adultery and promptly went to Italy with her lover. Most perplexing was her gaity, her refusal to take life seriously. "Could she really go on, be happy like this?...Laura had broken her marriage vows, she had 'run off with another fellah'!...now divorced and remarried, she was careering gayly on". To the father, Laura was "a symbol of an ardent town, spending, wasting, dancing, mad", indifferent to morals, tradition and culture. His grandmother, he remembered fondly, had stuck to the essentials; a strong farm woman who had cooked, sewed, spun, wove, made cheese, pickles, jam, quilts, mattresses, she had not worried about success, fashion, wealth or money. But city life had created new demands, new pressures. Even his "old fashioned" daughter Edith, married and the mother of five, baffled her

father with her anxiety to secure needless frills and fads for her children, cramming her life with petty plans and worries. "She was always talking of being old fashioned," he noted in disgust, "but Edith was not old fashioned for she was alive to the modern age".[30]

In upper class marriages, the pressures created by the husband's single minded dedication to financial advancement were among the most taxing on the viability of the union; absorbed in his business affairs, the man had little time, energy or interest in his wife or family. "I can stand it no longer. I cannot live with you...We are strangers - we have always been so...Your whole interest in life is your business and you come home to read the newspaper and to sleep".[31] Having reproached her husband thus, Honora Liffingham (A Modern Chronicle) filed for divorce. Women did not escape indictment, however; it was the wives who spent recklessly, foolishly, who avidly imitated the fashionable ladies in New York, nagging their husbands for countless luxuries he could ill afford. "If it weren't for the women, the men wouldn't be so keen on the scent for gain," complained Robert Herrick bitterly. "The women taught the men how to spend, created the needs for their wealth" (The Web of Life).[32] Moreover, the opportunities created by the new industrial order filled women with a novel sense of independence. With marriage no longer the sole means of financial security, women were less tolerant of

their husband's indiscretions, more willing to leave unpleasant situations. "The business women will bring about a new kind of marriage", Una taunted her unemployed, alcoholic husband, "[one] in which men will _have_ to keep up respect and courtesy" (_The Job_).[33] To the shocked bewilderment of the older generation, brides flaunted their self-reliance, by talking about marriage as an experiment, a trial run, to be terminated without trauma or regret should it prove unsuccessful. "She was engaged not in illustrious precepts of conduct, but in realizing her independence and this realization of herself appeared to her as the supreme and peculiar obligation of her being...Nothing about duty! nothing about consideration for her family! nothing concerning the awful responsibility of entering lightly into such sacred relationships!" (_Virginia_).[34]

"They are supremely selfish," charged one critic of modern womanhood, "that if the least difference in taste develops, or if another man chances along whom they momentarily favor more than their husband, they get a divorce... Their idea of marriage is not a mutual sacrament which brings happiness through trials born together... (_A Modern Chronicle_).[35] Selfishness, a restlessness with the tedium of marriage, dissatisfaction with the husband's income or social status, a craving for good times and forbidden pleasures, these were the basic motivations which social conservatives[36] assigned to those filing for divorce. Unfortunately,

in their eyes, the popularity of contemporary American ideologies, whether articulated in the conventional rhetoric of rugged individualism or disguised under the form of socialism (with its overtones of "free love"), seemed to justify such egotistical actions. Honora Liffingwell (A Modern Chronicle) left her husband following a righteous indictment of his business practices and a passionate invocation of her rights as an individual, although disillusionment with her husband's declining prosperity and a fatal infatuation with the other man were the fundamental reasons behind her revolt. It was this individualism, this narrow pursuit of one's happiness at the expense of society which had produced the horrors of the capitalistic society and which was now threatening the stability of family life. "You speak of individual development," Mrs. Van Vorst commented crossly. "Look at the wrecks with which society is strewn from this fatal shoal. All the strange ills...from nervous prostration to insanity, from...'restlessness' to suicide" (The Issues of Life).[37]

Socialism, fashionable among the intellectual elite and social reformers, represented a second ideological menace to the permanency of marriage. In Thomas Dixon's The One Woman; a Story of Modern Utopia, the hero, a Christian minister, anguished by the plight of workers in his parish, became converted to the doctrines of socialism; at the same time, he was entralled by the sinister beauty of a fellow worker and divorced his faithful, broken-hearted wife,

claiming his new marriage shall "be a prophecy of the revolution that shall redeem society... We will call womanhood from enslavement to form, ceremony, tradition in which the brute nature of man has bound her, out and up into her larger self, the mate and equal of man." The minister's idealism proved tragic; the wife, scornful of her husband's gentleness and inwardly desiring a strong man as head of the family, repudiated him, scornfully using the terms of her marriage contract to justify her actions. "I claim the perfect freedom you preach. I will do as I please. You can do the same..."[38] Although Dixon's novel is an excellent example of popular Progressive fiction at its worst,[39] it does express the strong conviction of the conservatives that divorce was wrong because it countervened the underlying laws of human existence. "The family at which you aim this blow," the minister was warned by his father, "is the basis of all law, state, national and international. It is the unit of society, the basis of civilization itself. Marriage is not a mere convention between a man and a woman, subject to the whim of either party. It is a divine social ordinance on which the structure of human civilization has been reared."[40]

This certainty that marriage, as a permanent and stable relationship, was sanctioned by tradition, history and religion, and represented an integral and necessary part of western civilization made it difficult for conservatives

to compromise their principles, although they frequently sympathized with the victims of unhappy unions. This dilemma was most thoroughly explored in the novels of Margaret Deland, probably the most popular and influential of women writers during the Progressive Era; her literary works were serialized in the leading ladies' magazines of the period. Her first novel on the marriage question, Philip and his Wife depicted the deadening impact of a marriage without love upon the couple and their child. Written with sensitivity and warmth, the plot developed about Philip's agonizing decision to divorce his wife; the continuation of a marriage, he argued, was unethical when it destroyed the integrity of the participants and undermined the innocence of the children. "This question of marriage and divorce is the question of the day" he cried passionately. "We must meet it, we must answer it... This isn't the time to talk about Moses and the prophets; we've got to come to each man's own conscience". Ernest, moral and sincere as Philip may seem, the author was explicit in her judgement that his action was a form of subtle selfishness. "Divorce can't be considered from the individual's standpoint. It's a social question, a race question", Philip was warned. "Our progress is in direct proportion to our idea of the sacredness of marriage and even the innocent mustn't tamper with that ideal sacredness." If the marriage should prove unworkable, then a legal separation, based on a recognition that the marital

ties may be severed only by death, may be tolerated; divorce, the dissolution of holy wedlock, cannot be countenanced as it destroys an institution created with divine approval, for the sole purpose of pursuing happiness with a new partner.[41]

Inherent in Mrs. Deland's argument, as in other conservative writers, was not only the certainty that an absolute order exists but an acceptance that unhappiness, hardship and suffering were the fate of man, not the temporary products of a man-created social system. "[Marriage] is hard on the innocent sometimes...but the individual has got to be subservient to the race," an observer noted harshly (Philip and his Wife). "They've got to suffer -that's all. It's a pity, but they've got to suffer."[42] If an individual must accept evil and pain as part of an eternal order, then it is logical that she also accept her place in the human plan. Social conservatives had little doubt that there were explicit roles for women: marriage and maternity. "I can affirm," Doctor Morrison advised a young wife, unhappy with her pregnancy, "that I have never seen a truly satisfied woman who has not at some time held in her arms a child of her own" (The Issues of Life). The rebellion of woman against her fate, as reflected in a reluctance to marry, and in the practice of birth control, could only result in neurosis, for her role was an inherent part of her essence, her femininity.[43]

Unlike conservatives who emphasized the personal failings and selfishness of those seeking divorces, social liberals presented divorce as an escape for the innocent from the brutality of harsh circumstances. Sylvia (Sylvia's Marriage) left her husband, following the delivery of her son, born blind, because of syphilis. Gabriella (Life and Gabriella) refused to tolerate the moral indiscretions of her husband and divorced him, apparently with little unfavorable impact upon her two children. Emma McChesney was divorced at twenty-six (Emma McChesney and Company) when she was no longer willing to live with her alcoholic shiftless husband. "I believe in marriage. I consider it a sacred thing. I would do anything in my power to protect and preserve a marriage," proclaimed Mary Abbott, summarizing the attitude of liberal and socialist alike. "But I hold that it must be an equal partnership. I would fight to make it that, and whenever I found that it could not be that, I would say it was not marriage but slavery and I would fight just as hard to break it" (Sylvia's Marriage).[44] In their view, marriage was an individual commitment, a promise made by two persons to love and honor each other. When that initial love had vanished, when domestic harmony had been replaced by bickering, anger and resentment, the marriage was no longer morally legitimate. Indeed, they argued, the institutionalization of marriage had brutalized and degraded intimate human relationships by subjecting

them to impersonal legal limitations. Was the maintenance of society worth the sacrifice of individuals? "I'm not sure that I care a good deal of an institution that smothers the kindly things in people...", Doctor Deane wearily noted. "I'm not sure that an arrangement of life which does not leave place, for the most real things in life is going to continue forever" (Fidelity).[45]

Despite the agitation of conservatives, divorce became increasingly commonplace in Progressive society and literature. In the nineteenth century, divorce had been an unknown phenomenon in parts of the United States. Divorcees were excluded from high society, noted Edith Wharton in her best selling novel of 1904, The House of Mirth ("except", she added satirically, "those who had showed signs of penitancy by being remarried to the very wealthy").[46] By 1917, heroines were divorcing almost casually, with little significance attached to the decision, other than as the termination of an unpleasant episode. However, it would be erroneous to assume that the American public at large approved of this new approach to marriage. Divorce remained a current topic of debate until the outbreak of the war; indeed, it is noteworthy that Winston Churchill, the best selling novelist of the Progressive Era, and Margaret Deland, the most respected female novelist concerned with the woman question, both strenuously opposed a liberalization of

divorce laws. It is probable that their views reflected the opinions of the general reading public more accurately than those expressed by liberal writers.[47]

"The more one delves into the novelistic and dramatic literature of our times," noted a concerned social critic, "the more one becomes convinced that the marriage problem is one of the deepest felt problems of the present age."[48] Indeed, the animated, often bitter discussions of marriage and divorce indicate the problems created for American society by the new women of the Progressive Era.

NOTES

1
Edna Ferber, "A Homely Heroine" Buttered Side Down (New York: Frederick Stokes, 1911), p. 192.

2
Helen Reimennsyder Martin, Tillie: A Mennonite Maid (New York: Century Company, 1904), p. 129.

3
The 'new woman' frequently stereotyped the life of her mother as one of slavery and drudgery. See, for example, the attitudes of Margaret in Kathleen Norris, Mother (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1911); Alison Carr in Winston Churchill, The Inside of the Cup (New York: MacMillan, 1913); Kate Barrington in Elia Peattie, The Precipice (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914); Hagar in Mary Johnston, Hagar (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913); Freddie Maitland in Margaret Deland, The Rising Tide (New York: Harper, 1916); Jenny in Ellen Glasgow, Virginia (New York: Doubleday, 1913); Tillie in Helen Martin, Tillie.

4
Thomas Dixon, The Clansman (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1905), p. 127.

5
Helen Martin, p. 18. The author stresses that this attitude was typical of the majority of inhabitants in southern Pennsylvania.

6
There is considerable debate concerning the validity of labelling prevalent family structures in America as "patriarchal" in the strict sense of the term. William E. Bridges in an article "Family Patterns and Social Values in America, 1825-1875", The American Culture ed. H. Cohen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 257, questions the relative importance of the American father in domestic affairs. The development of an atomistic, impersonal, competitive socio-economic order, he insists, destroyed the closely knit, stable, self-sustaining, well disciplined family structure of agrarian society and replaced patriarchal authority with that of the mother. Although his assertions are not in my opinion, adequately documented, they are supported by the conclusions of Robert Elno McGlone in an unpublished doctoral thesis "Suffer the Children; the Emergence of Modern Middle Class Family Life in America, 1820-1870" (University of California, 1971) in which he discusses the emergence of a "new maternal matrix" in the nineteenth century. However,

it was generally accepted during the Progressive Era that the basic family structure was patriarchal, in that the ultimate authority as provider and head of the household lay with the husband.

7 Glasgow, p. 200.

8 Peattie, p. 25.

9 Upton Sinclair, Sylvia's Marriage (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1914), pp. 85-86.

10 Ibid., p.151.

11 Henry S. Harrison, V. V.'s Eyes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), p. 175.

12 Ibid., p. 349.

13 Hamlin Garland, A Spoil of Office, (Boston: Arena Publishers, 1892), p. 251.

14 Typical was the advice given to Thea, an aspiring opera singer by her friend, Dr. Archie who warned her not to marry and settle down until she had given herself a chance (Willa Cather, The Song of the Lark). Indeed, it is only when she has achieved international acclaim that she marries.

Similarly, many "new women" considered marriage with reluctance, fearful that it would mean the end of a worthwhile career. See, for example, Kate Barrington in Elia Peattie, The Precipice; Deborah in Ernest Poole's His Family (New York: MacMillan, 1917) Hagar in Mary Johnston, Hagar.

15 Glasgow, p. 428.

16 Peattie, p. 88.

17 Susan Glaspell, Fidelity (Boston: Maynard, Small and Company, 1915), p. 273.

18
Johnston, p. 274.

19
Poole, p. 210.

20
Arthur Bullard, Comrade Yetta (New Jersey: Gregg Press, 1913), p. 445.

21
Kathleen Norris, Saturday's Child (New York: Doubleday, 1913), pp. 424-432.

22
Hamlin Garland, The Rose of Dutcher's Coolly (New York: Harper, 1895), pp. 332-333.
The characterization of males as villains - so common in the domestic novel, is less apparent in Progressive fiction. If men became less important in the plot of the novel, it was not necessarily because the new women were anti-masculine, as has been suggested, but because their lives were no longer centered on the whims of men. Indeed, there emerges in literature a "new man", one who readily relinquished his privileged status because he wanted a woman who was his intellectual equal, not a servant or a subordinate. He denied, moreover, that his masculinity be defined by occupational roles or in economic terms, and he accepted the fact that his wife's career would frequently draw her away from home. ("Go to your great undertaking. Go as my wife...I shall go to you when I can; you must come to me - when you will." The Precipice, p. 417) Victorian readers, no doubt, would have contemptuously dismissed him as a weakling dominated by a shrewish mate. Of course, conservatives reacted in a similar vein and denounced the emasculation of American men by agressive and militant women.

23
Hamlin Garland, Diaries (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1968), pp. 84, 89.

24
Johnston, p. 217.

25
Margaret Deland, The Awakening of Helena Ritchie, (New York: Harper, 1906), p. 16.

26
For a detailed discussion of social attitudes to divorce, see William L. O'Neill, Divorce in the Progressive Era (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

27 Margaret Deland, "Individualism and Social Responsibility," Independent, 53 (1901),M1172-4.

28 H. B. Watson, "The Deleterious Effect of Americanization upon Women," Lippincott's Magazine, 84 (1909), 782-92.

29 Winston Churchill, A Modern Chronicle (New York: MacMillan, 1910), p. 173.

30 Poole, pp. 57, 58, 224, 296, 204.

31 Churchill, p. 377.

32 Robert Herrick, The Web of Life (New York: MacMillan, 1900), p. 41.
The indictment of success-oriented women as a major cause of the weakness of spiritual forces within the United States is a prominent theme in Herrick's work and the subject of his controversial novels, Together (New York: MacMillan, 1908) and One Woman's Life, (New York: MacMillan, 1913); these shall be discussed briefly in chapter five.

33 Sinclair Lewis, The Job (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1917), p. 270.

34 Glasgow, Virginia, p. 414.

35 Churchill, A Modern Chronicle, p. 275.

36 For the purpose of this discussion on divorce, the following writers have been labelled social conservatives in that they opposed "easier" divorces as detrimental to society.

Winston Churchill, A Modern Chronicle.
Winston Churchill, The Inside of the Cup (New York: MacMillan 1913).
Margaret Deland, Philip and His Wife (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1894).
Margaret Deland, The Awakening of Helena Ritchie (New York: Harper, 1906).
Margaret Deland, The Iron Woman (New York: Harper, 1910).
Thomas Dixon, The One Woman (New York: Doubleday, 1903).

Robert Grant, Unleavened Bread (New York: Soulner, 1900).
Robert Herrick, Together
Robert Herrick, One Woman's Life
Kathleen Norris, Mother (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1911).
Kathleen Norris, Saturday's Child (New York: Doubleday, 1917).
Mrs. John Van Vorst, The Issues of Life (New York: Doubleday, 1904).
It is interesting to note that although they were conservative on the question of divorce, they were not conservative in the popular sense of the word. (i.e. they did not support the established order per se). Indeed, Winston Churchill and Margaret Deland are outstanding examples of popular novelists who were committed to social reform and horrified at the exploitation of the masses by a brutal economic system. Churchill's novel, The Inside of the Cup, is a skilful presentation of the Social Gospel interpretation of marriage.

37
Mrs. John Van Vorst, p. 196.

38
Thomas Dixon, pp. 160, 238.

39
Crowded with the paraphernalia of overwrought sentimentality, the novel is both ludicrous and implausible. The plot culminates in a death defying train ride by the Governor of New York (the former lover of the minister's faithful wife) through a blizzard which had conveniently destroyed the communication system, to order a full pardon for the minister convicted of murdering his best friend (the lover of wicked wife number two) and ends in a touching? reunion of the minister's family in the prison yard.

Although a gross misrepresentation of actual socialist views toward love and marriage, Dixon's novel, a best seller, probably represents an accurate description of what many Americans believed socialism to be concerned with. The novelist synthesized two incompatible views: 1) that socialism is Unamerican because it represented a retreat from individualism to a glorification of the herd instinct ("Socialism is the mark of mental and moral breakdown, the fleeing from self-reliant, individual life into the herd for help"; 2) that socialism is flagrantly individualistic, because it exalts self fulfillment at the expense of family and society (..."the family will be trampled to death beneath its feet").

40
Dixon, p. 195.

41 Margaret Deland, pp. 215, 229-30.

42 Ibid., p.229

43 Mrs. John Van Vorst, p. 195.

44 Sinclair, p. 232.

45 Glaspell, p. 180.

46 Edith Wharton, The House of Mirth (Toronto: Scibner, 1905), p. 38.

47 See James Barnett, Divorce and the American Divorce Novel, 1859-1937:. (New York: Russell and Russell, 1939), a pioneer study of the divorce question in American literature. Although interesting in approach and style, it contains many serious errors in interpretation. He notes of Philip and His Wife that "the divorce characters...are not painted as...violators of the laws of God and man." (p. 95). He argues that A Modern Chronicle demonstrates that "the results of the divorce are not portrayed as shocking or drastic." (p. 107). Such blatant misunderstandings of these novelists intentions - and there are others, undermine the usefulness of his conclusions.

48 Phillip Rappaport, Looking Forward (Chicago: Charles Kerr, 1908), p. 218.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Thus for Emancipated Woman": Two Critics of the New Feminism

> "Women in America, splendidly free and Queen!... what have you done for the souls of the men given into your keeping?...The answer roars up from the city streets,- the most material age and the most material men and the least lovely civilization on God's earth...Thus for emancipated Woman..."
>
> - Together (1908).[1]

In 1901, the Independent published a series of four essays on the foibles of modern womanhood, written by a staunch traditionalist, Henry Finck. Proclaiming the womanly woman as the highest and latest product of civilization, Mr. Finck strongly deplored their increasing involvement in the world outside the home; such dalliance in the masculine sphere, he predicted ominously, would destroy the feminine qualities of the gentler sex, eliminate chivalry and gallantry, and undermine the rightful superiority of men. "If women are to have the same education and ideals, the same employments, the same sports, the same political life as the men, their thoughts and feelings, their tastes and mannerisms and even their features and figures will gradually approximate those of men."[2]

Mr. Finck's adamant disapproval of the modern woman was not singular; indeed, the new feminism was frequently

attacked as dangerous to the social fabric of the nation, and its principles decried as pernicious. A highly explosive issue which touched every American regardless of sex, social status or class, the woman question challenged the most basic of human concepts and values: family, marriage, sexuality. It evoked a highly emotional response; vituperative abuse was heaped on the "third sex", the "mannish women", the "shrieking sisters", the "lunatic fringe" who had denied their rightful station in life. The vehemence of this rhetoric suggests that opposition to the changing role of women was larger than mere resistance to the upward mobility of a once subordinate minority. As was evident in the agitation over divorce, challenges to conventional marriage and patterns of femininity were interpreted as an attack upon a particular social structure which had characterized an illustrous American past and an undermining of ethical values embodied in the womanly woman as popularized in poem, story and song. Even sympathizers of the new woman watched the disappearance of the lady with a bewildering, lingering sense of loss, for she had represented a certain charm and softness conspicuously absent in a harsh industrial system. Ellen Glasgow, who had greeted the woman's movement as a liberation of humanity, regretfully lamented the fate of the lady in her novel, Virginia; her heroine, modelled on the author's Southern mother, had, in true womanly fashion, absorbed herself totally in her

family, destroying her own aspirations and identity. Her only armour was goodness and her fate was that almost inevitable martyrdom which awaits pure selflessness in a world where self-interest has always been the governing power." The lady, Miss Glasgow concluded sadly, was a symbol of "a thwarted human longing for the beautiful and the good."[3]

Progressive novelists - those who were "social" commentators as distinguished from the pulp writers, judged the woman question as one of the most pressing problems facing their society. Less militant in their criticism or approval of the new feminism than journalists (novelists at least went through the pretensions of objectivity), their value judgments were no less penetrating or explicit. Although a remarkable portion of popular literature openly adulated the new woman, the dominant attitude ranged from friendly criticism to vehement repudiation.[4] Interestingly enough, few novelists echoed Mr. Finck's sentiments that the womanly woman represented the highest evolutionary development of the fairer sex; rather, they offered alternative heroines who were a curious blending old and new feminine ideals. Inherent in their works were thoughful appraisals of the new industrial order, the limitations of human freedom and the feasibility of reform, questions which they considered intimately connected with the woman's movement.

One such social conservative was Robert Herrick, a cantankerous professor at the University of Chicago. Repelled by the grasping materialism of his adopted city, he expressed a total disenchantment with American society (..."the least lovely civilization on God's earth"), a bitter disappointment in the failure of womanhood as moral guide, and a wistful glorification of the pioneer wife as ideal woman. In 1908, he published a controversial novel, Together, a study of the impact of individualism on modern marriage. "The subject I had in mind was a forerunner of our nation's preoccupation with WOMANKIND," he recorded in his memoirs, "and the peculiar aspect of WOMEN that I took ...was the marriage bond which has always been and always will be the crutial point of the woman world."[5] His frank portrayal of five American marriages, with its explicit treatment of illicit sex generated a righteous fury in the press, pulpit and on the platform of women's clubs; many libraries refused to place the novel on their shelves - in Canada, it was banned. "Guised in story form," wrote one reviewer crossly, "the book is an outrageous attack on American womanhood which every American man with an ounce of decent blood in his veins should bitterly resent."[6] Six years later, Herrick published a second study of the destructive tendencies inherent in women's individualism; the novel, One Woman's Life, although not a popular success, clarified and elaborated his case against the new feminism.

Robert Herrick felt he had suffered much at the hands of ambitious women. He resented his mother, a petulant, nagging creature who had squandered her husband's modest income on private schools, fashionable doctors and frivolous luxuries, and carefully sheltered her children from the "social contamination" of less fortunate neighbours. He sadly recalled that his father, a discouraged and sick man, "anticipated no delight, no solace within his home. Complaints, fault-finding, reproaches would greet him at the door and dog his tired footsteps to bed."[7] Herrick himself found little happiness in his marriage; he was irritated by the extravagances and social aspirations of his wife, whom he cruelly caricatured as Millie in One Woman's Life. Moody, temperamental and overbearing, Herrick was not an easy man to live with. He had numerous love affairs which he meticulously noted in a private journal, dubbed the "Love Book"; none, he concluded wearily, had been spiritually satisfying. He had less sympathy for the fickle affections and moral indiscretion of women. He wrote contemptuously of the new woman who rebelled against the confines of marriage. " 'I cannot love this man whom I have married, though he feeds me and gives me of his best...I will not consent to live with him and bear children for him and thus be a slave... I will divorce this man who can no longer thrill me'...So she cheats herself with fine phrases."[8] He was, what less objective women would term, a forerunner of arrogant male

chauvinism. Robert Herrick was not popular at the University where his impersonal, aloof manner annoyed collegues and students; they sarcastically referred to him as a "puritan gentleman". Scarred by unhappy childhood memories, disenchanted in love and in marriage, and rebuffed by a critical reading audience, Herrick embroidered his comments about modern womanhood with a deep sense of personal grievance.

Herrick's bitterness was heightened by his distaste for the industrial urban order. To him, Chicago was the epitomie of the sordid, raw materialism which had marred the spirit of America. "A trolley car boomed and snarled raucously through the ill-paved street, a terrific blast of dust and gas and soot assailed him when he rounded a shabby flat building; it was Chicago; it was more - it was America. It was the climax of 'the greatest century of human progress man has ever made.' " (Waste).[9] Sickened by the pitiless scramble for wealth and prestige, Herrick adamantly condemned the prevalent ethic of success at any price which had subordinated moral standards and aesthetic values to crass materialistic gain. "But what is this almighty society, any hour," he queried bitterly, "save a lot of fools and scamps with a sprinkling of strong souls, who are fighting for life - all of them fighting for what only a few could get. The strong must rule, the world is for the strong." (Memoirs of an American Citizen).[10] Although sympathetic

to the complaints of the oppressed, he had little faith in reform movements or organized agitation. "Nobody really cares to make the sacrifices, "his protagonist, Howard Sommers declared cynically in The Web of Life,"... the rich will buy out the leaders. Better times will come and we shall all settle down to the same old game of grab on the same old basis."[11] Like Thoreau, Herrick shunned group action in favor of individual responsibility. "If man were right with himself, square with his own soul...there would be no wrongs to right by machinery, by laws, by discussion, by agitation, by theories or beliefs...Yes, the world needed a Religion, not movements or reform." (Together).[12]

A chronicle of the fortunes and manners of upper income classes, Herrick became disillusioned with the emancipated lady and her lofty aspirations of independence. "Egotism is the pestilence of our day," Dr. Renault charged bitterly, "And worst of all, it has corrupted the women, in whom should lie nature's greatest conservative force." "What have you made of marriage 'leading your own lives'?," he continued savagely. "You make marriage a sort of intellectual and intelligent prostitution - and you develop divorce" (Together).[13] The quest for personal freedom thwarted woman's maternal instinct; American wives were reluctant to endure the discomfort of pregnancy, childbirth, and the demands of helpless babies. "They have lost their prime function: they will not or they cannot get children."[14]

The offspring of such grudging mothers were petted and indulged as suited mama's whims, then delivered into the competent arms of a governess or packed off to boarding school. Isabelle Lane, the "modern" heroine of Together, was baffled and bored by the social pretensions of her daughter until she realized that the child had never known another life. "...a home to fit into, a cat and a dog, a few dolls and the kitchen and the barn to run about in - that was more than Molly Lane with all her opportunities had ever had."[15] Restless, temperamental, frequently neurotic, American women became dissatisfied wives who aped the lifestyle of the aristocracy and taxed the financial resources of overworked husbands. "If it weren't for the women, the men wouldn't be so keen on the scent for gain. The women taught the men how to spend, created the needs for their wealth." (The Web of Life).[16] Most tragic, women had failed in their role as spiritual guide; amoral creatures, deluded by the glittering aura of financial success and social status, they were indifferent to the acts of fraud and deception which had purchased their comfort. "Man is given you to protect, and you drive him into the marketplace, where he fights for your ease, and then relaxes in the refined sensualities you offer...With the fall of man into the beast's trough must come the degradation of women." (Together).[17]

Millie, the superficial, amoral heroine of Herrick's

novel, One Woman's Life was, in her creator's description, an "adventuress,...a fortuitous, somewhat parasitical creature". "Could one blame her," he asked wearily, "remembering her sentimental education, the sentimental ideals that for centuries and centuries have been imposed...She could not see the simple selfishness of her life."[18] Herrick was annoyed by the cloying platitudes of feminine culture which had instilled in women a vague, illusionary confidence in their spiritual superiority. Extolled as sublime, divine, mysterious creatures, apart from men and somehow more noble in ideals and aspirations, girls viewed themselves with complacency, rationalizing personal ambitions by an appeal to higher purposes. What Isabelle Lane had excused as a commendable longing for "experience", a "broad view of life", Herrick dismissed as egotism guised under a charming manner (Together).[19]

If the cult of womanly womanhood had deluded American girls by offering a comfortable self-image, the idleness of middle class females denied them a creative purpose in life. "The trouble obviously was that Millie had not enough to do to occupy her abundant energy...It was supposed to be quite enough for a married woman to...be a gracious and desirable companion to her husband in his free hours for relaxation" (One Woman's Life).[20] Hence, woman's affinity for fads, movements, theatre and intimate afternoon chats - any activity which offered diversion from the idleness of

long days. Financial independence for women was commendable, but Herrick suspected that few wives were willing to accept the responsibilities of a gruelling career. "That was the terrible fact about earning one's living, Millie learned. The jobs - at least those she was fitted for - were all parasitical and involved personal humiliation. From this arose Millie's growing conviction of the social injustice of the world to women."[21] Yet he felt that employment was a solution for the restlessness of American femininity. "What everyone needs is something to do and women must be trained like men for their jobs," exclaimed one observor at a suffragette meeting, bored by the incessant complaints of the speakers.[22] Robert Herrick, in an observation on his novel, One Woman's Life, concluded grimly that the moral of it all "was to give the girls jobs."[23]

Alarmed by the failure of marriage in America, Herrick wistfully recalled an earlier, happier time when harmony had existed between the sexes. Then, man and wife had faced the wilderness united, sharing suffering and hope together in the bitter battle to wrest a living from a reluctant land. In the pioneer era, he argued, "the Man and Woman are free and equal...they win or lose together... This is the marriage type of the pioneer - a primitive, back wrecking struggle of two against all, a perfect type, elemental but whole - and this remains the large pattern

of marriage today whenever sound."[24] Yet, he acknowledged that a changing economic structure had rendered the pioneer ideal obsolete; the man gambled alone in the competitive market, and the woman idly squandered the fruits of his labor. In Herrick's blunt terminology, "Woman, no longer the Pioneer, no longer the defender of the home,...blossoms as...the Spender. She traffics with man for what he will give and she pays with her soul."[25] Although he implied that creative employment for the wife would restore the balance, he preferred to indulge in dreams of a simpler, sylvan utopia. When Isabelle and John Lane paused to repair their shattered relationship (Together) they did so by fleeing from the materialistic spirit of the city to the wilds of the American West.[26]

Suspicious of causes and impatient with individualism, Herrick had little sympathy for the emancipated woman. Yet he was avowedly bored with the womanly woman and her cult of moral superiority and spiritual innocence. He wearied of the mystique surrounding womanhood ("her special function was but a universal means to a universal end."), and he was repelled by the repeated denials of woman's sexual nature; indeed, he achieved notoriety in his frank discussions of women's suppressed emotions and inhibitions.[27] In sharp contrast with the passive, acquiescent lady of the nineteenth century, his ideal woman was strong, self-reliant and resourceful, immune to the rigors of hard work and

childbirth; he spoke approvingly of Mrs. Short, a former school teacher who had raised and prepared a daughter for university, did most of the cooking and washing for a rural clinic, and still found time to read all the magazines and books available in her small village (Together).[28] Herrick found little that was distressing in the prospect of women competing with men in the economic system; his ideal heroines were frequently nurses, teachers, settlement workers or laundry supervisors. Yet he believed that there was a role and a place for women. The prime function of woman, he argued, was to bear children and he expressed approval of the wives who gladly accepted pregnancy. Alice Johnson, another strong farm woman, explained, "I know we belong to the thriftless pauper class that's always having children - more than it can properly care for...But it doesn't seem right to keep them from coming..."[29] Different biological roles accounted for the personality traits of the respective sexes; men, in Herrick's opinion, were peculiarly suited for the lofty pursuit of idealistic goals in the arts and the professions. Alves Preston, mistress of Howard Sommers, wistfully noted her lover's preoccupation with his work. "The man had his work; his ideas were the children of his soul and the woman had the children of her body. Each went their way and worked his life into the fabric of the world." (The Web of Life).[30] Although scornful of the moralistic rhetoric of womanly womanhood, it is evident that Herrick

expected women to exert a spiritual influence in American life; indeed, it was the amorality of the independent woman which most aroused the ire of the novelist.

The themes and complaints voiced by Herrick were commonplace in Progressive literature.[31] Upper class ladies were frequently caricatured as lazy, superficial creatures who flaunted the spirit of Christianity even when mouthing its rhetoric; an idle plutocracy was not consistent with the American tradition. Interestingly enough, liberals viewed the woman's movement as a liberation from the role of lady and an awakening to a heightened sense of moral responsibility. Carlisle Heath, the heroine in V.V.'s Eyes was well on her way to becoming a new woman after she had realized her failure as an ethical force in American society. "She had never been asked to measure herself by moral standards at all...She had been all for the...establishment of the upward bound, where self propelment was the test of right and wrong." Her new philosophy was expressed in her concern for the poor and the exploited (Carlisle as lady, had flippantly dismissed the complaints of her father's employees, "We're always giving them money...and what do they do in return, besides grumble and riot and strike and always ask for more").[32] Indeed, new women were invariably portrayed by their sympathizers as sensitive, gentle and tender, the caretakers of moral values and ethical

standards; it was this coupling of individualism and social responsibility which distinguished the Progressive ideal from the "flapper" of the roaring twenties. The anxiety expressed over the moral laxity of the upper class is evidence of an alteration in values already apparent in pre-war America.[33] Liberals, however, were optimists who viewed the insurgence of women as but part of a larger reawakening of American citizens to a sense of duty; conservatives, pessimists who denounced the new feminism as symptomatic of the moral degeneracy of the Republic.

Contemporaries shared Herrick's wistful enthusiasm for a vanishing agrarian lifestyle and, like him, frequently praised the western woman as the most admirable synthesis of two eras. Lacking the shrinking, passive nature of the Victorian lady, she was strong, resolute and self-reliant, boldly facing incredible hardship for the love of her man. "There was Jack Hanson's little wife, with their children, in a twelve by fourteen foot tent out there on their claim alone all day and many nights, while Jack was on the works, and Mrs. White who stoutly declared that she was sure going to stand by her Jim if it burned her to a crisp'...and the others, who were holding down their husbands' claims while the men were earning money on the works to help them in getting started." (The Winning of Barbara Worth).[34] Barbara Worth, fondly described by her author as "true representative of a true womanhood" was gaped at by amazed

Eastern tourists who considered her radical because she broke the conventions of the lady: she wore a divided skirt and rode in a man's saddle; she carried a revolver and frequently travelled alone in the desert; she was keenly interested in the development of Colorado and discussed financial transactions with her father, a banker; she was friendly with the rough men lounging in the saloons and unembarrassed by crude mannerisms and casual introductions. "Beautifully strong and pure and fresh and clean in mind and heart and body," Barbara, like a true woman of Victorian times was fulfilled in marriage.[35] In Progressive literature, the new woman was identified with the industrial, urban society, the true woman equated with an agrarian lifestyle. No where was the rift between the modern and the traditional more clearly expressed than in Wright's best-seller, When a Man's a Man. Boasted Stella, the aging wife of a rancher, "We've been happy for over forty years...we've...just lived every minute, that's a blamed sight more than a lot of these higher cultured, top-lofty, half-dead couples that marry and separate and separate and marry again now-a-days can say...and these folks that's swoppin' the old-fashioned sort of love that builds homes and raises families and lets man and wife work together...for these new, down-to-date ideas of such things, they're makin' a damned poor bargain ..."[36] Such was the vindication offered for a vanishing lifestyle and a crumbling ideal of womanhood. It is ironical

indeed, that the New England professor and the Bible-toting Wright who so resented effete eastern intellectuals, should share a common vision of femininity.

2.

> ...In our diletante charities, in our passionate reforms, in our sentimental cocksureness, can we deny an excited, conceited, inconsequent empiricism...
>
> - "The New Woman Who Would Do Things" (1907)[37]

"We believe in the New Woman and we are proud of her," wrote Margaret Deland in 1910, "...(but) it is neither cowardice nor pessimism which makes serious-minded men and women say that with the promises and privileges of life as they are revealing themselves to woman in her discontent and her changing ideals, there is also a danger."[38] Author of numerous short stories and novels, Margaret Deland was a recognized authority on the woman question. Her many essays on the new feminism were published in the leading periodicals of the period; her novel, The Awakening of Helena Ritchie was hailed as a greater work than Tolstoy's Anna Karenina in that it represented a higher ideal of womanhood.[39] She articulated the viewpoint of countless American women who had repudiated the passive, domestic role of conventional femininity, but were reluctant to accept the tenets of their more militant sisters. Active in social reform, with a particular concern for prostitutes and unwed mothers, a proponent of sex education and responsible parenthood (she defended

the "right of children not to be born" into unfavorable conditions) and a friend of radicals (shocking Boston gentility by inviting a Russian anarchist to tea) she was "conservative" in regard to the woman question. She opposed the liberalization of divorce laws as destructive to society. She questioned the wisdom of extending the suffrage to all women and harshly criticized what she termed the "excessive individualism" of the feminist movement.

In her autobiography, Golden Yesterdays, Mrs. Deland recalled, with some amusement, her own youthful rebellion against the cult of true womanhood. Reared in the "barbarous orthodoxy of the eighteenth century," Margaret had grown up in the Victorian atmosphere of a conservative Pennsylvannian village. There, parents demanded - and received, absolute obedience. Religion was primitive and harsh, fervent ministers threatening credulous congregation with hellfire and damnation. Education was highly structured, moralistic and superficial; Margaret attended Petham Priory at New Rochelle, New York, a boarding school for "young females of good family connections" run by two venerable English ladies who celebrated the Queen's birthday and schooled the girls in religion and deportment. Upon graduation, it was expected that a girl would dutifully live at home, supervise Sunday school, be charitable to the poor, and attend parties until marriage to a diligent God-fearing boy. Margaret rebelled. To the consternation of her

relatives, she resolved that she should support herself in the city, at a time when economic independence for women was regarded as a novel and "unlovely" idea. She attended Cooper Union in New York, where she studied drawing and design; these subjects she subsequently taught at Hunter College, a girls' normal school. "I preferred freedom and New York to conventionality and Parnassus," she wrote of her decision.[40]

In New York, Margaret met and married a young Bostonian, Lorin Deland, a business executive who was to immerse himself in municipal reform and the workers' club movement. After marriage, Margaret threw herself enthusiastically into a number of fund raising projects, from delivering milk to market gardening, to the horror of her staid family who had hoped marriage would "settle" the girl. In 1882, she had her first encounter with prostitutes, "painted women tapping on the glass." Disturbed by the plight of working girls with illegitimate children, Margaret determined to take unwed mothers into her home, and provide them with economic security and companionship during the difficult period of readjustment. "If you could get hold of a girl who has taken the first wrong step - a girl just out of the hospital with her baby, you could have her come here for a while" she reasoned, "and let her get fond of it..."[41] She began writing seriously in 1887, and published a controversial novel, John Ward, Preacher, a penetrating

study of a Calvinist minister torn between his stern belief in eternal damnation for the unrepetant and the gentle, merciful Christianity of his wife. Snarled one Chicago reviewer, "Every atheist should have the book on his bookshelf."[42] Nor was papa pleased; dabbling into theological matters, he growled, was unladylike and unrefined.[43] In 1890, her first trip to Europe was marred by her discoveries of the shocking poverty of the lower classes, and the meekness and complacency with which it was accepted. She was appalled by the utter degradation of those who sewed the finery of the rich "half-naked subterranean creatures sweating and stitching...sweating and stitching...elderly men... with sweat on their bald heads and sunken cheeks."[44] The impression was lasting. When her husband discovered similar conditions in the sweat shops of Boston, Mrs. Deland became involved in social welfare agencies, sponsoring summer camps for working girls and supporting temporary-employment schemes. An intimate friend of Boston theologian and bishop, Phillips Brooks, Mrs. Deland repudiated her strict Presbyterian background and adopted a more humanistic Christianity.

There was much which Mrs. Deland found wrong in the traditional stereotype of feminine roles. Womanly women were expected to be selfless, to sacrifice personal gratification for the benefit of others, yet was such self-immolation, such repression of natural needs, she reasoned,

possible, even desirable? In her stories, women driven by a compulsive need to give, frequently destroyed those whom they loved.[45] "[Mothers] gave all their powers, moral, intellectual, physical, to their households, and in so doing practiced, sometimes, a curiously immoral unselfishness which...turned well-meaning husbands into brutes and children into disagreeable tyrants."[46] Their willingness to be sacrificed, their need to "do their duty", their passive, at times righteous acceptance of degrading conditions brutalized and perverted family relationships. Moreover, the womanly women had been encouraged to sacrifice themselves for one minute unit of human existence; the social issues of the world beyond kitchen and nursery were irrelevent, unimportant. "The new Ideal demands that she shall also do her part to keep her street clean, or her city clean or her world clean, because it is best for the great human family, that she must also love," Mrs. Deland noted, in an article on Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi brothers. "When we put such impulses beside Cornelia's narrow wish only for her sons' success, how great the change seems to be! and how divine as well."[47]

If self-sacrifice and domestic isolation were not inherent qualities of femininity, neither were moral innocence or instinctive motherhood. Ladies had been carefully shielded from the facts of life and cautioned by dutiful mothers that passion was a brute instinct, implanted in man

by God for His (mysterious) purposes, but absent in the more refined, spiritual nature of woman. Mrs. Deland said little about the pleasure of sex; no doubt she shared the opinion of her contemporaries that it was an unpleasant necessity, but she forcibly protested the ignorance prevalent among girls of all classes. Mrs. Deland recalled one night when she had been urgently summoned to a tenement house in Boston by a bewildered and distraught mother; the daughter, a girl of fourteen, with short skirts and long childish braids, was eight months pregnant. "I didn't know" she wailed. "The shame was not for the children," Mrs. Deland concluded wearily, "it was for the parents for they 'knew' and had never shared their knowledge...Certainly, we are not to wait to let children 'know' by inexorable teaching of experience."[48]

If motherhood without marriage had been a girl's ultimate shame, motherhood within marriage was her greatest triumph. The womanliness of a wife was enhanced by each new addition to the household, regardless of the ability of the family to adequately provide for its welfare. This, Mrs. Deland adamantly condemned. "...in our mother's and grandmother's day, maternity, <u>per se</u> was believed to have a moral significance; and the wife who brought little children into the world, irrespective of the fact that perhaps she could not provide for...their well-being, was lauded as the ideal woman, instead of being recognized...as a social

sinner - an irresponsible materialist."[49]

"That Woman is in the Market Place will probably be admitted without discussion...she is there! And she is going to stay there."[50] A recognition that changing conditions had necessitated a changing image of femininity was at the basis of Mrs. Deland's acceptance of the new woman. Wistful rememberances of "women in the home", and of placid, content mothers made pleasant evening conversations, but could provide no pragmatic alternate philosophy for women who worked in the new order. Much of the revolution in the status of women was good, and healthy, in that it had broadened her world and her influence. Yet there was much which Mrs. Deland viewed as frightening and hostile to the very fabric of society. Her most sweeping indictment of the woman's movement was elaborated in The Rising Tide; her heroine, a radical young feminist, defeated in her rebellion against the laws of nature.

"(Feminism)'s bigger than just - people," exalted Freddie Payton. "Feminism is the most interesting thing that had come into Race Consciousness since the human race began to stand on its hind legs." The daughter of an unhappy but dutiful mother ("I always did my duty") and a dissipated father, she had little respect or patience for traditional womanly virtues. Discontented with the enforced idleness of a "ladylike" existence, Freddie opened a small

real-estate office; women who were content to be supported by their husbands or their fathers, she charged angrily, were "parasites", "kept" women. The cult of true womanhood, the code of chivalry, she repudiated contemptuously. "'Chivalry', and women working twelve hours a day in laundries! 'Chivalry', and women cleaning spittoons in beer-salons! 'Chivalry', and prostitution!" She viewed marriage and motherhood with dim pleasure: "Marriage generally hampers a woman...marriage - as men have made it, entirely for their own comfort and convenience, with its drudgery of looking after children - is stunting to women." In her more flippant moods, she labelled maternity a prison, although she conceded that she wanted to bear children "who would push the world along to perfection." Embittered by the fate of her brother, a mentally retarded boy, ("What right had she and 'old Andy Payton' to bring him into the world?) she strenuously argued the cause of planned parenthood. Convinced that women were the victims of a male-dominated society, Freddie had little sympathy for men. In her more tolerant moods, she affirmed the equality of the sexes. Usually, however, she asserted the superiority of women; at her most extreme, she dismissed men as unimportant aside from their biological function, "Men are of no use but to continue the race."[51]

The solution to the woman question as Freddie saw

it was economic independence and political rights. If women could vote, they could reform the world, solve those problems of poverty and misery created by the incompetence and cruelty of men." One of the things the women's vote is going to do, besides giving the Floras of the world a chance to be independent of men is to obliterate class lines."[52] Her own ultimate act of personal liberation was to propose marriage to Howard Maitland, a man whom she admired: a gesture which would demonstrate "that women and men are equals in the supreme business of lovemaking."[53] Rebuffed by an amazed and shocked Howard, and bewildered by the collapse of her varied hopes, Freddie made the anguished discovery that the role of women was indeed shaped by inexorable biological laws. Her capitulation to her fate was culminated in her marriage to Arthur Weston, an outspoken critic of Progressive feminism.

Although sympathetic to the girl's grievances and ideals, Mrs. Deland viewed the surrender of Freddie as fitting, indeed imperative for the welfare of society; in her eyes, Freddie was a sincere, but dangerous idealist. The feminist movement, she charged, was based on a number of erroneous assumptions about human behavior and potential. The first and most obvious was an incredible naivete, an innocent belief that the liberation of women would inaugurate a golden age of peace, harmony and unlimited achievement. Freddie had promised striking laundry women that support

for Smith, the "Woman's Candidate" would solve the ills of the factory system, although an observor ironically noted that he was a ruthless political boss and a major stockholder in the company whose exploitation the women were protesting.[54] It was this simplification of complex and intricate questions which infuriated Mrs. Deland. "This new woman does not know how to wait...there seems to me a certain arrogance in the bustling, feminine haste to make over the world."[55] Mrs. Deland was firmly convinced there was order in the universe, a divine purpose in the apparent sordidness of human foolishness and suffering; those who sought to alleviate exploitation must first recognize the omnipotence of the creator and the limitations of human action. "I suppose the plea for time is really a plea for law, and that always seems to me a statement of the faith that is in us."[56]

In her writings, Mrs. Deland had toyed with the problem of human freedom and had concluded that individuals were born into a hierarchical society in which their liberty and their potential were limited by race, heredity and sex.[57] Convinced of the inherent inferiority of the black race, she vigorously opposed the extension of suffrage rights to black women ("To the vote of that fierce, silly amiable creature, the uneducated Negro, the new woman would add the vote of his sillier, baser female.")[58] Nor was she happy with the political equality enjoyed by white American males:

ignorant, uncouth immigrants, she asserted, had abused their voting power by electing rogues and crooks to office and had undermined the moral tone of the Republic. Idealists had erred in the past by extending suffrage indiscriminately to the illiterate, the unscrupulous and the unaware; women, she warned, must not repeat their mistake by demanding an unqualified extension of political rights to all females, regardless of education. Mrs. Deland scoffed at anti-suffragettes who were reluctant to contaminate feminine innocence with the grime of the political arena - women, she asserted, were as suited for politics as their male counterparts, but she was appalled by the recklessness of feminists who would give the vote to the Irish scrub woman and the Negro cook.[59] Her explicit repudiation of political individualism as articulated by the "Founding Fathers" is symptomatic of the disillusionment felt by an upper class elite who blamed the manipulation of ignorant foreigners by rapacious bosses and entrepeneurs for the moral crisis in the nation.

"Civilization...a highly differentiated idea of property, is like a pyramid standing on an apex that rests on the permanence of marriage. Anyone who tampers with the stability of that base tampers with civilization."[60] Not only were individuals hampered by the limitations of race and class, but they were born into a structured society in which the maintenance of institutions necessitated their subordination to the common interest of society: hence, her

opposition to divorce, a legalistic maneover which she felt undermined the stability of human existence by exalting individual happiness above social responsibility.[61] For the woman, her biological chemistry added a special restriction. Freddie had proudly asserted her belief in the equality or "sameness" of the sexes when she had proposed marriage to Howard Maitland. But a woman had no such freedom, argued Mrs. Deland, for the traditional etiquette surrounding courtship - the reluctant girl and the persistent suitor, were not polite conventions but manifestations of basic physical differences between the two sexes. "She had come...against a biological fact, namely, that reluctance in the woman makes for permanence in the man...For the child's sake, she tries, by every sort of lure, to hold man to permanence...For the 'child' is the most important thing in the world."[62] The new woman had decried the artificiality of relationships between men and women, and had demanded a greater freedom and honesty. Mrs. Deland insisted that women were not at liberty to pursue such noble friendships, for their role as seducer had been decreed by inexorable biological laws. She was angered by what she termed the "sex arrogance" of the new women who babbled about their individuality and their independence. While condoning many aspects of modern femininity, Mrs. Deland asserted that the essence of womanhood was maternity; the girl who denied her destiny was doomed to unhappiness and frustration.

Mrs. Deland's insistence on woman's sexual role was not unusual; even new women expressed difficulty in reconciling their personal freedom with their traditional feminine functions. In the Progressive era, it was argued by some that women were not instinctive mothers. Noted Kate Barrington thoughtfully, "She was beginning to understand that not all women were maternal...Good mothers were quite as rare as good fathers." (The Precipice)[62] - hence the agitation for home economics in the schools, the popularity of baby books, prenatal seminars and lectures on child care. No longer was it universally accepted that motherhood alone was the ultimate expression of femininity. "Her children were failing her not only as companions, but as a supreme and vital reason for living." (Life and Gabriella).[63] Yet many new women hesitated to echo the boast of Hagar that "my work is my child...if maternity happened, it would be but added bliss." (Hagar).[64] Indeed, it was doubted that a woman could attain happiness without the experience of pregnancy and childhood. "Why do you suppose Nature divided the race into male and female?", a socialist crossly questioned a young unionist leader who had been cautiously avoiding marriage. "For more millions of years than we can count, Nature has been at work making women, shaping their bodies by minute steps, forming intricate organs within them for a specific task...Do you think that all of a sudden, you can break the age old habit." (Comrade Yetta).[65]

"The most striking characteristic of the gay nineties seems to have been its complacency - we thought very well of ourselves."[66] Happily married and comfortably situated, Mrs. Deland had little personal sense of frustration at her role in American society. Indeed, she reflected the confidence felt by many average American citizens who, although disturbed by the social ills of an industrial society, felt that their nation was the most progressive and prosperous in the world. A fervent Christian, she had faith in the ultimate purpose of human existence. She sympathized with feminists who abandoned the parasitical life of the lady for a meaningful career - had she not done the same? - but she distrusted their questioning of woman's biological roles and disapproved of their impractical idealism. Proud of the democratic freedom which her country represented, she retained a sense of class superiority shared by many, well-meaning reformers. Indeed, she was much respected by her contemporaries as a novelist who had synthesized the best of traditional womanhood and the new feminism.

NOTES

1
Robert Herrick, Together (New York: MacMillan, 1908), p. 517.

2
Henry Finck, "Are Womanly Women Doomed?" Independent, 53 (1901), 268. See also, "Employments unsuitable for Women"; "Only a Girl"; "Woman's Glorious Opportunities", Ibid, 834-7; 1061-4; 1238-42.

For an interesting rebuttal of Finck's arguments, see C. S. Parrish, "The Womanly Woman," Independent, 53 (1901), 775-78.

3
Ellen Glasgow, A Certain Measure (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), pp. 83, 96.

4
This contradicts the conclusions reached by James B. Storey in his unpublished doctoral thesis "The Popular Novel and Culture in the Progressive Era" (University of Oklahoma, 1971). He argues that "while authors exalted the 'new woman' indirectly by revealing her traditional counterpart unsympathetically, they also did so directly by presenting the new woman in a highly favorable light." While it is true that some popular writers sympathized with Progressive feminism, Storey cites novelists who explicitly criticized the new woman. He quotes, for example, from Harold Bell Wright, The Winning of Barbara Worth and Thomas Dixon, The Clansman, despite the fact that both novels are clearly a defense of "traditional" womanly virtues. He greatly oversimplifies the writings of Winston Churchill, so as to obscure that author's very real concern with the problem posed by feminism.

5
Quoted in Blake Nevius, Robert Herrick: the Development of a Novelist (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 180.

6
Ibid., p. 166.

7
Ibid., p. 10.

8
Herrick, p. 516.

9 Herrick, Waste (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1924), p. 72.

10 Herrick, Memoirs of an American Citizen (New York: MacMillan, 1905), p. 75.

11 Herrick, The Web of Life (New York: MacMillan, 1900), p. 140. He continued "The world, at least this civilization, belonged to the strong; the poor would remain weak, and foolish and treacherous." (p. 256). Indeed, the theme of the novel was the futility of rebellion against the conventions of society for the sake of personal ideals.

12 Herrick, Together, p. 231.

13 Ibid., p. 498.

14 Ibid., p. 516.

15 Ibid., p. 575.

16 Herrick, The Web of Life, p. 41.

17 Herrick, Together, pp. 498-9.

18 Herrick, One Woman's Life (New York: MacMillan, 1913), pp. 404; 149.

19 Herrick, Together, p. 499.

"Before the blast of his scorching words, Isabelle saw her ambitions shrivel into petty nothings - all the desires from her first married days to find a suitable expression of her individuality...her seeking for 'interesting' people and a cultivated and charming background for herself, and last of all her dissatisfaction in her marriage because it failed to invoke in her the passion she desired. It was a petty story...she had wanted many things that now she saw as futile."

20 Herrick, One Woman's Life, p. 167.

21
Herrick, One Woman's Life, p. 129.

When Millie espoused her philosophy to Ernestine Geyer, a laundry supervisor, the latter responded cynically, "They're mostly looking for some soft snap working women." Herrick continued, "...Her philosophy was simple, but it embraced the woman question, suffrage and the man-made world. To live, she said, you must give something of yourself that is worth the while of Somebody Else to take and pay for...To Millie, it seemed a harsh philosophy. She wanted to give when and what she liked to whom she pleased and take whatever she wanted." (pp. 324-5).

22
Ibid., p.

23
Nevius, p. 237.

24
Herrick, Together, p. 513.

For an extended discussion on the changing role of women in American society, see pp. 513-18.

25
Ibid., p. 517.

26
Ibid., p. 587.

27
Sex, although no longer completely ignored in popular literature, remained a delicate subject, gingerly alluded to in subtle phrases. Critics harshly condemned the decadence of more liberated foreign writers. See H. W. Boynton, "Ideas, Sex and the Novel," Dial, 60 (1916), 361. "The real facts of life," he grumbled, "is a phrase which seems too often...to be nothing better than an euphemism for the risky or dreary side of sex."

28
Mrs. Short appeared in Together under various guises. Dr. Renault recalled his great aunt whom he considered the ideal woman, in details strikingly reminescent of Mrs. Short: "She was a country clergyman's wife, away back in a little village. She brought up four sons, helped her husband fit them for college as well as pupils he took in, and baked and washed and sewed. And learned German for amusement when she was fifty." (p. 243).

29
Herrick, Together, p. 154.

30
Herrick, The Web of Life, p. 288.

31
Robert Herrick, biographer, Blake Nevius argued that there were no "real" women in prewar fiction and Herrick's novel, One Woman's Life was a pioneer endeavor. This argument, of course, is contrary to this thesis. Interestingly enough, Robert Grant published an immensely popular novel, Unleavened Bread in 1900 which is remarkably similar in theme and style to Herrick's work.

32
Henry Harrison, V.V.'s Eyes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), p. 429; 67.

33
See James McGovern, "The American Woman's Pre-War Freedom in Manners and Morals," Journal of American History, 55 (1968), 319.

34
Harold Bell Wright, The Winning of Barbara Worth (New York: Book Supply Company, 1913) p. 304.

35
Ibid., p. 290.

36
Harold Bell Wright, When a Man's a Man (New York: Book Supply Company, 1916), p. 84.
Indeed, the entire novel is a vindication of simple western virtues over the sophisticated modern values of Eastern intellectuals. The heroine, a native girl who could sew, cook, ride and rope, had become bored with the narrowness of her life following her education in the East. Repelled by theooffer of marriage by Everard Charles Parkhill, a sickly, selfish professor - the symbol of the Eastern intelligentsia, Kitty rediscovered her true role as woman and married strong, silent "Wild Horse Phil".

37
Margaret Deland, "The New Woman Who Would Do Things," Ladies Home Journal, 24 (1907).

38
Margaret Deland, "The Change in the Feminine Ideal," The Atlantic Monthly, 105 (1910). 290-1.

39
Quoted by Ellen Glasgow in her autobiography, The Woman Within (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1954), p. 196. Miss Glasgow had little respect for Deland as an artist and less for the critic.

40
Margaret Deland, Golden Yesterdays (New York: Harper, 1940), p. 73.

The details of Mrs. Deland's childhood are drawn from her two autobiographies, If This Be I: as I Suppose it to Be (New York: Appleton, 1935), and Golden Yesterdays.

41
Deland, Golden Yesterdays, p. 153.

Mrs. Deland believed that the child was the cohesive bond in a permanent family structure and hence, the foundation of society. Hence, her insistence that the unwed mother retain her child as a means of assimilation into society.

42
Ibid., p. 222.

43
Ibid., p. 206.

44
Ibid., p. 250.

45
See "The Face on the Wall"; "Elizabeth", Mr. Tommy Dove (New York: Harper, 1893).

46
Deland, "The Change in the Feminine Ideal," p. 292.

47
Deland, "Cornelia" (third in a series, "Studies of Great Women.") Harper's Bazaar, 33 (1900), 2155.

48
Deland, "I Didn't Know," Ladies Home Journal, 24 (1907), p. 9.
"I think I may say that, of more than one hundred girls (most of them mothers, before they were twenty, of illegitimate children) who have told me more or less of their wretched story, ninety per cent "didn't know'."

[49] "Change in the Feminine Ideal," p. 2156.

[50] Deland, "Woman in the Market Place" Independent (1916), 287.

[51] Deland, The Rising Tide (New York: Harper, 1916), pp. 65, 141, 168, 129, 129.

[52] Ibid., p. 154.

[53] Ibid., p. 184.

[54] Ibid., p. 112, 117.

[55] "The Change in the Feminine Ideal," p. 301.

[56] Ibid., p. 300.

[57] See "A Black Drop," R. J.'s Mother and other People (New York: Harper, 1908), in which a young northerner, informed that his southern fiance was part Negro, decided to surrender her; his revulsion was instinctive, Mrs. Deland commented approvingly, for interracial marriage "pushes the white race back." (p. 238.)

Similarly, she felt that within the white race itself, there were classes intrinsically superior because of inherited traits. See "The Law or the Gospel," The Wisdom of Fools (New York: Harper, 1897) A naive philanthropist, interested in the salvation of wayward Nellie was distressed and bewildered by the girl's stubborn refusal to reform. The problem, suggested the author, was the reformer's assumption of the latent goodness of all individuals. Although appalled by the complacency with which the British tolerated class distinctions, Mrs. Deland never fully accepted the optimistic belief that an amelioration of economic conditions and education would obliterate social differences. There were many, she believed, who were poor because of fate, but there were others who were ignorant and skilled because of an intrinsic superiority.

[58] "The Change in the Feminine Ideal," p. 299.

59 Margaret Deland, "Third Way in Woman Suffrage," Ladies Home Journal, 30 (1913) 11-12.

60 "The Change in the Feminine Ideal," p. 301.

61 See Chapter four, in which Mrs. Deland's attitudes to divorce are discussed at some length.

62 Deland, The Rising Tide, pp. 238-9.

63 Elia Peattie, The Precipice (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), p. 148.

64 Ellen Glasgow, Life and Gabriella (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1916), p. 373.

65 Mary Johnston, Hagar (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), p. 265.

66 Arthur Bullard, Comrade Yetta (New Jersey: Gregg Press, 1915), p. 418.

67 Deland, Golden Yesterdays, p. 300.

CONCLUSION

"The Working man and the Woman, the New Woman, be it remembered, meet us at every page of literature written in the English language..."[1] Despite the concern about the woman question in the Progressive era, evidenced in the number of novels, essays and articles on the topic, and in the strident, at times hysterical overtones which the debate assumed, subsequent historians have largely dismissed the topic as unworthy of serious study. The suffrage movement has been the subject of considerable scholarship, yet it is interesting to note that contemporaries viewed the agitation of women for equal voting rights as but part of a much larger cultural crisis, one which was concerned with fundamental social issues - marriage, family, sexual roles. For many new women, suffrage was a symbol of liberation from an inferior position within American society. "It is to benefit all women by removing them from the class of the unconsidered, the superficial and the negligible," noted Kate Barrington thoughtfully (The Precipice),[2] but she, like many of her sisters, did not consider suffrage as the only, indeed the most vital issue in the woman's movement. This attitude to the vote, as expressed in popular literature, raises several interesting problems. Those who have studied the suffrage issue note that the suffragettes subordinated feminist demands to one goal, the achievement of equal political rights. When

women were granted the vote after the war, Progressive feminism collapsed because it had become a one issue movement. While a plausible explanation for the disappearance of an organized woman's campaign, it does not account for the fate of those who had never regarded suffrage as the ultimate expression of feminine liberation.

If Progressive feminism was more than a demand for the franchise what were its basic complaints and requests? The new woman was rebelling against a tradition which had defined femininity in terms of the lady. "The true woman," protested Professor C. S. Parrish, "may work with her hands or with her brain, she may be attractive or unattractive to the average man, she may be...the mistress of a home or the forewoman in a machine shop, a doctor, a lawyer, a dentist. She may love a good man and be his wife...or she may...refuse both wifehood and motherhood." Concluded the professor passionately, "She is never the mere minister to a man's sensual pleasure...she is never, voluntarily, his dependent or his plaything."[3] For the new woman, the "lady" was a definition of womanhood in biological terms; it had described a supposedly inherent feminine personality and had always been a subordinate to man, a delicate creature who had arranged her hair, her face and her thoughts to please those of her mate, an individual who lacked the desire - even the ability to survive on her own without the assistance of a male. The new woman repudiated such a stereotype. She

refused to judge herself by male standards, and she boasted that she was equal to man in her skill, independence and strength. "She had a mind as good as his...She had a virtue and a character that had no part with the business of sex. There was no competence a man had that this woman did not have. She was...versatile, thoughtful, fearless and free..." (Angela's Business).[4]

It is true that the new woman's demands were moderate in practise. She attacked conventional marriage, but accepted a permanent relationship as a basic and necessary institution. She proclaimed her desire for economic independence and freedom of career, but rarely demanded equal pay and opportunity. She was reluctant to mother broods of sickly children, but continued to regard maternity as a beautiful and necessary expression of her femininity. She asked for the traditional American rights of freedom and individualism, but she utilized her liberty within the sober confines of social responsibility. She proclaimed her liberation from the traditional patterns of feminine behavior, but she was confused at the complications caused by marriage and children. Yet the new woman expressed perceptive insights into the feminine condition which scholars have argued were to be found only within radical and bohemian circles.[5] Repudiating the lady as a sex object, she attacked the double standard and envisioned a new definition of sexual roles

(after all, a new woman necessitated a new man). She rejected a singular role for women, defending planned parenthood and praising working mothers. Moreover, the implications of the new feminism were clearly recognized, if exaggeraged, by social conservatives. The many "marriage" and "divorce" novels published during the Progressive era clearly indicate an awareness of changing attitudes on the part of the American public to traditional institutions.

The woman's movement was both a product and a reflection of the Progressive obsession with the social problems of the day. The Progressive dilemma has been defined as the inability of traditional American values, derived from an agrarian lifestyle, to cope with the problems created by an industrial, urban society.[6] " We live in strange days, in times of bewildering change," complained one old lady in Susan Glaspell's novel, (The Visioning).[7] Her complaint was a constant theme in popular Progressive literature. Novelists lamented the disappearance of the rural America of their childhood, or lauded the new opportunities in the city, according to their principles and temperament. In the debate, the feminine image became an ideal embodiment of two ways of life. The womanly woman was the symbol of a stable and ordered existence which had been centered about personal relationships and family ties; she was remembered as gentle, unselfish, passive and innocent - qualities which had become irrelevent in the impersonal

atmosphere of the city and in the competitive spirit of the economic order. The new woman was a creature of the industrial order and her escape from the feminine role praised by sympathizers as a liberation from the vacuity of rural America. To the disapproving critic, the new woman was the final victory of the forces of egoitism and individualism which were so responsible for the abuses of the capitalistic system.[8] For her sympathizer, she was the symbol of a moral regeneration in America, a woman who would use to her advantage the opportunities of the economic order while eliminating its abuses.

The new woman did not ask for sexual license, as her critics accused; she did not ever request liberty as an end in itself, but she did petition for freedom in order to be better able to serve. The new woman, in sympathetic popular literature, was a middle class lady who had repudiated her security and her social status because she felt guilty at her uselessness in the moral life of the nation and shamed by her isolation from the larger issues of the day. True, new opportunities in education and in the professions created the preconditions of woman's insurrection in providing the skills and the independence necessary for an active involvement in society. But it was the questioning of traditional American values and the sense of moral urgency which produced the woman's movement. It was natural that well educated women, moved by a feeling of helplessness,

should examine the rationale of their sheltered condition. The questioning of their role as ladies was only one step from their examination of the patriarchal family structure based on the superiority of the male sex. Viewed in this sense, the new woman was not merely a feminist, but a feminist with a firm belief in the values of social responsibility and higher ethical guides - beliefs which imbrued the woman's movement with curious moralistic overtones.[9]

A new image of womanhood became popular in the Progressive era. The Progressive woman was strong, self-reliant, determined, even in conservative literature. Although the debate over the function of women in society remained unresolved and the primacy of the maternal role generally accepted, the definition of a feminine personality and of feminine traits was eroded. In the sentimental literature of Victorian America, it had been assumed that a woman was timid, pious, emotional and delicate; her constitution, it was argued, rendered her unfit for intellectual pursuits or arduous professions. Most Progressive novelists recognized women as the intellectual, emotional spiritual equals of men; the long suffering Victorian lady was dead. This redefinition of femininity, however awkwardly articulated and imperfectly realized, was indicative of a changing attitude toward the proper role of American women in society. Yet, the resistance to a complete acceptance of the new woman by the reading public was proof of their reluctance

to abandon traditional feminine values, a resistance so deep rooted that much of contemporary feminism is but a re-echoing of age-old complaints.

NOTES

1
Ouida (pseud.), "The New Woman," North American Review, 11 (1894), 610.

2
Elia Peattie, The Precipice (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), p. 89.

3
C. S. Parrish, "The Womanly Woman," Independent, 53 (1901), 776.

4
Henry Harrison, Angela's Business (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), p. 345.
In popular literature, women had repeatedly complained about their sense of powerlessness caused by their lack of freedom, "That's the worst of being a woman," Honora Liffingwell cried plaintively, "we have to sit and wait until something happens to us...It's dreadful to feel that one has the power and not to be able to use it." (A Modern Chronicle, p. 23). The plea of the new woman was for the liberty necessary to develop her own personality, and for a recognition of her worth apart from her sexuality. "I am fighting to be myself. I am fighting for that same right for the other women." (Hagar, p. 171).

5
June Sochen, The New Woman (New York: Quadangle, 1972).

6
David Noble, The Progressive Mind (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 3.

7
Susan Glaspell, The Visioning (New York: Frederick Stokes, 1911), p. 416.

8
In nineteenth century America, individualism became equated with the capitalistic ethic. The myth of "upward mobility", the popularity of the "rags to riches" tradition served to vindicate the frenzied scramble for wealth and success in the economic order as a manifestation of the American belief in the ability of the individual to triumph amid unfavorable conditions. In the Progressive era, social critics, appalled by the anarchy and brutality of the capitalistic system, repudiated its individualism and re-iterated the importance of social responsibility. Their indictment frequently extended

beyond a condemnation of economic individualism. Disillusioned by the manipulation of government by unscrupulous financial interests, many questioned the wisdom of traditional political priveleges. (If populists had demanded more democracy as a remedy for bad government, others, like Margaret Deland, urged a restriction of the suffrage, thus negating the traditional acceptance of political equality.) Indeed, it is interesting to note the amount of "conservatism" evident in popular literature: many who became involved in social reform movements were immune to the "progressive" ideas which supposedly characterized the era. It may be concluded that large numbers of the American reading public shared Margaret Deland's belief in a universal order, an omnipotent God, racial superiority, class distinctions, sexual roles and family traits even while proclaiming their freedom as citizens of a democratic society founded on the principle of the equality of man.

9

The concern expressed over the moral laxity of the upper classes, and the frequent descriptions of the nation's youth as selfish, fickle and flighty, indicate that a minority had already rejected the ethical principles of the "American Way." The image of feminine freedom later embodied in the "flapper" of the Jazz Age is a theme, although a very minor one, in prewar fiction. For the most part, however, new women were somewhat sober creatures who demanded a recognition of their humanity, so that they might play a useful role in society.

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